SONS AND DAUGHTERS

A NOVEL

BY

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MDCCCXC

SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

"THEN you will not take the share in the business which I have offered you?"

"No, I think not, sir. I don't like it. I don't like the way in which it is worked. It would be entirely out of accordance with all my training."

"So much the worse for your training—and for you," said Mr Burton, hastily.

"Well, sir, perhaps so. I feel it's ungenerous to say that the training was your

own choice, not mine. I think it, of course, the best training in the world."

"So it is—so it was when I selected it for you. There's no harm in the training. Few boys come out of it with your ridiculous prejudices against their bread and butter. It's not the training, it's you—that are a fool, Gervase."

"Perhaps so, sir," said the young man with great gravity. "I can offer no opinion on that subject."

The father and son were seated together in a well-furnished library in a large house in Harley Street—not fashionable, but extremely comfortable, spacious, expensive, and dignified. It was a library in the truest sense of the word, and not merely the "gentleman's room" in which the male portion of a family takes refuge.

There was an excellent collection of books on the shelves that lined the walls, a few good pictures, a bust or two placed high on the tops of the bookcases. It bore signs, besides, of constant occupation, and of being, in short, the room in which its present occupants lived—which was the fact. They were all their family. Mrs Burton had died years before, and her husband had after her death lived only for his boy and—his business. The latter devotion kept everything that was sentimental out of the former. He was very kind and indulgent to Gervase, and gave him the ideal English education — the education of an English gentleman: five or six years at Eton, three or four at Oxford. He intended to do, and did, his son "every justice." Expense had

never been spared in any way. Though he did not himself care for shooting, he had taken a moor in the Highlands for several successive seasons, in order that his boy should be familiar with that habit of the higher classes. Though he hated travelling, he had gone abroad for the same purpose. Gervase had never been stinted in anything: he had a good allowance, rooms handsomely furnished, horses at his disposal, everything that heart could desire. And he on his part had done all that could be desired or expected from a young man. If he had not electrified his tutors and masters, he had not disappointed them. He had done very well all round. His father had no reason to be otherwise than proud of his son. Both at school and college he

had done well; he had got into no scrapes. He had even acquired a little distinction; not much, not enough to spoil him either for business or society—yet something, enough to enable people to say, "He did very well at Oxford." And he had made some good friends, which perhaps was what his father prized most. One or two scions of noble houses came to Harley Street to see him; he had invitations from a few fine people for their country houses, and ladies of note who had a number of daughters were disposed to smile upon the merchant's son. All these things pleased Mr Burton much, and he had been quite willing to assent to his son's wish that he should end and complete his experiences by a visit to America, before beginning the work which

had always been his final destination. He had now just returned from that expedition, and it had been intended that he should step at once into his place in the business—that business which was as good as, nay, much better than, an estate. Up to this time the young man had made no objection to the plan, which he was perfectly acquainted with. So far as his father knew, he was as well disposed towards that plan as Mr Burton himself, and looked forward to it with as much satisfaction. It may therefore be supposed that it was with no small consternation, with displeasure, disappointment, and indignation, one greater than the other, that the father had sat and listened to the sudden and astounding protest of the son. Not go into the business!

It was to Mr Burton as if a man had refused to go to heaven; indeed it was less reasonable by far: for though going to heaven is supposed to be the height of everybody's desire, even the most pious of clergymen has been known to say "God forbid!" when he has been warned that he stands on the brink of another world. One would wish generally to postpone that highest of consummations; but to refuse to go into the business was a thing incredible. Mr Burton had raged and stormed, but afterwards he had been brought into partial calm through the evident impossibility of treating his son in any other way. To scold Gervase was practically impossible. To treat him like a child or a fool was a thing that could not be done. His own composure naturally affected all who had

to do with him, and his father among the rest. That passionate speaking or abuse, or violence of any kind, should fall dumb before his easy and immovable quiet, was inevitable. He had waited till the outburst was over, and then he had gone on.

"And what else then, if not in my office, do you mean to do?" Mr Burton now said.

"I suppose, sir," said Gervase, "I am right in believing, as everybody does, that you are a rich man?"

"Well; and what then?" said the merchant, with a wave of his hand.

"And I am your only child."

"Of that, at least, there can be no doubt. But I repeat, what then?"

"I may be wrong," said Gervase,

ingenuously, "but at least everybody says—that every means of making an income is pursued by crowds of people, more than can ever hope to make an income by it. I may not state the facts so clearly as I wish."

"There are more men wanting work than there is work to give them. I suppose that's what you mean."

"Far better said than I could say it. In that case, my dear father," said Gervase, with a look of imperturbable reason and candour, "why should I, who have no need to work and no desire for it, help to crowd the already overcrowded field?"

Mr Burton gave a start like an excited horse, and evidently had to make an effort to restrain the corresponding burst of

utterance. But the conviction that these impatient outbursts did more harm than good restrained him. He said with simulated calm—

"I am not aware that there is any crowd—at my gates, to force an entrance into *my* business—to the place which I have naturally reserved for my son."

"My dear father," Gervase repeated, with an almost caressing frankness and appeal to his superior judgment, "there are hundreds who could do it much better than your son. There is Wickham's son——"

"Try not to drive me beyond the bounds of patience," cried the merchant, with suppressed excitement. "Wickham's son—my old clerk——"

"Who has served you most faithfully

for years. And Charlie Wickham is worth twenty of me—in all that concerns business——"

"That's not saying very much," cried Mr Burton, with a snort of rage.

"I am sorry you should say that, sir—for, of course, it shows that you thought I would be a mere cipher in the business; whereas I am sure Charlie——"

"Look here, Gervase," cried his father. "Let's understand each other. You are free to come in and prepare yourself to take my place, which would be the course of nature; but if you don't think fit to do this, I have no desire for your advice. I don't believe in your advice. Keep your suggestions to yourself. As for your Wickhams—— If I bring in anybody in your place, I'll bring in new blood. I'll bring

in more money. I'll——" He felt himself getting hot and excited—and the calm and slightly wondering countenance of his son, although seen through a mist of irritation, and apt to send any man dancing with fury, yet held him in as with a bridle, so strong was the superiority of the calm to the excitement. "Try not to drive me beyond the bounds of patience," he said.

"Well, sir?" replied Gervase, spreading out his hands and slightly elevating his shoulders. The gesture was French, which irritated Mr Burton more and more: but he said nothing further; and it was not till he had taken up the 'St James's Gazette' which lay on the table, and read through two of those soothing articles on nothing particular with which that journal abounds, and which the merchant in his anger read

from beginning to end without the slightest idea what they were about, that he allowed himself to speak again. He was then preternaturally tranquil, with a quietude like that of an anchorite in his voice.

"I suppose," he said, "that you have taken everything into account in making this decision—Miss Thursley, for instance—and given up all idea of marriage, or anything of that kind?"

Gervase's quiet looks became slightly disturbed. He looked up with a certain eagerness. "Given up?——" he said.

"Of course," said Mr Burton, delighted to have got the mastery, "you can't marry—a girl accustomed to every luxury—on your boy's allowance. Five hundred a-year is not much—it might do for her pin-money, with a little perhaps to the good

for your button-holes. But what you would live upon, in the more serious sense of the words, I don't know."

The young man's composure had completely disappeared during this speech. Astonishment, irritation, and dismay came into his face. He did not seem able, however, to believe what was said to him. "I thought — that you were in every way pleased with—the connection," he said.

"Certainly I am—a better business connection could not be, for a young man seriously entering into commercial life. A *dilettante* is a different pair of shoes——"

"A *dilettante*—I don't object to the name," said Gervase, with a faint smile.

"Madeline is a *dilettante* too. She has some money of her own. And I feel sure she would agree with me."

"In setting her father at defiance, and marrying upon nothing——?"

"Father," said Gervase, distressed, "I had no intention of setting you at defiance. I have certain opinions—of my own—which are new. Business—is not congenial to me. Some of its methods seem—— But I need not explain. I never meant, however, to set you at defiance. I thought that in myself I—had some claims upon you apart from the business——"

"What claims? I am the author of your being, as the old books say, and I've responded to that claim by giving you everything that a king's son could have had. You have been just as well off as the Prince of Wales. What more do you want? I think my claims are better founded than

yours. It is I who have a right to something in return, not you."

Gervase's countenance was a sight to see; it changed altogether from the calm certainty of superior right which had been in it. The first astonishment did not pass away, but other sentiments came in. Doubt — slow conviction that there was something in what his father said — a strong feeling, nevertheless, that it was impossible he could himself be altogether in the wrong. All these warring sentiments rose upon the clear and calm conviction of his earlier state, and blurred that spotless firmament. He drew a long breath.

"It is quite true," he said—"quite true all you say. You have given me everything—and I—have had nothing to give in

return. Still——" All nature was in that word—all the certainty of youth that it has a claim never to be ignored—that its mere existence is response enough; and all the traditions of family custom, which make the wellbeing of the child the first object of the father; and the unconscious assumption which every child instinctively makes, that, after all, its predecessors are passing away, and itself the permanent interest—an assumption which it is quite possible to hold along with the most anxious and affectionate care for these predecessors, and desire to retain them in life and enjoyment. All these things were in Gervase's mind, and quite naturally so. The difficulty was, perhaps, that these old-world relations are scarcely compatible with the calm and highly reasonable level

of equality on which the young man of the period conceives it possible to treat with his father, claiming a boundless right of independent judgment, and the serene satisfaction of taking a higher view, and being absolutely in the right whoever may be wrong. Gervase fell a little from that: his reason being appealed to, could not refuse to allow that there was a great deal in what Mr Burton said. Still, when all was done, was not the boy aware that he was his father's pride—that it was he alone who could continue and renew his father's house and reputation, and satisfy that desire of continuance which is in almost every mind? And this was an impression which it was impossible to resist, which was the very voice of nature. "Still——" Gervase looked up almost wistfully into his father's

face. Strong as that feeling was, it was one that required a grant, an admission, on the other side: it could not be put forth with calm assurance, as he made his other propositions, in full certainty of reason as between man and man.

"I know what you mean," said Mr Burton, with that sense of power that makes a man often brutal in the distinctness of both words and deeds. "You think, because you are my son, and perhaps a finer fellow than I ever was, that I'm bound to provide for all your caprices. Not at all. That's not in the bond. It's conceded by civilisation that a man should bring up his son according to his position, and help him to make the best of himself; but no more. Man to man, you've had all you had any right to from me, Gervase.

You've too much good sense not to see that. I offer you a way of doing for yourself, and you reject it. Well—you're a man, you say, and have a right to your choice. I don't deny your right; but you can't exercise that and have me to fall back upon too."

There was a pause. Mr Burton leant back in his chair with a mind satisfied, even triumphant. Either he had convinced his son, who would return to a consideration of the business part of the question with very different feelings; or else he had shaken off (decently, affectionately, kindly, but still shaken off) those claims which Gervase had made so undoubtingly, as if his father was bound to accept all his vagaries. In either way the position was very different from that

of an hour ago, when the father had not even been able to let off the rage that possessed him, for fear of the calm and philosophic countenance, unsympathetic, and disapproving of any such vulgar outbursts, which Gervase had turned upon him. The young man's troubled face was balm to his father's soul.

CHAPTER II.

THE Thursleys lived only a little way off, at the other end of Harley Street, in another large, spacious, old-fashioned, luxurious house, where a great deal of money was spent without very much show for it, and the best dinners, wines, beds, and conveniences of all sorts, that could be had for money, were to be found. The difference between the two houses was not very great — not nearly so great as might be found between two houses in Mayfair or Belgravia (though,

thanks to Liberty, and Burnet, and a few other æsthetic tradespeople, the difference between even the most artistic houses is much less than formerly). But the merchant style has a kind of distinction of its own. Both the Burtons and the Thursleys had large furniture, big sideboards, chiffoniers, sofas on which a family could have been put to bed, tables of a substantial size, easy-chairs which would comfortably engulf the largest mercantile gentleman. The houses had a certain masculine air altogether, as if the head of the establishment had ordered everything without consideration of any such ephemeral matter as a woman's tastes—which indeed was what had been done. They had given the order to their upholsterers largely, strongly, with no sparing

of expense. The new improvements that had crept in since, had been in the way of spring-mattresses instead of the old economy of feather-beds, which was an improvement that did not show; but otherwise the old Turkey carpets, the heavy curtains, the big pieces of furniture, had not been changed, at least in fashion, for thirty years. There was one difference, however, between the Burton house and that of the Thursleys. The former centred in the library, which was a sign that there were no ladies in the house — the latter in the drawing-room; and it was there that Gervase, entering about an hour later, found his Madeline, who had opened one of the big windows, though it was a cold evening, in order that she might hear his step. He had

already seen her since his return this morning; but it had been agreed between them, that though it was his duty to dine with his father, he might afterwards come in for an hour's talk and consultation with the lady of his love.

The drawing-room had three large windows, all draped in curtains of dark-coloured satin, behind the centre set of which Madeline, in her white dress, had been hidden while she watched for his coming. There was a resplendent fire shining from the midst of brilliant steel and brass, which reflected and heightened the effect of its great and glowing blaze. Comfort reigned everywhere: your foot was inaudible on the mossy carpets, you sank into the luxurious arms of the chairs. A number of pictures solidly framed were

on the walls; great and costly china vases, reflected in a huge mirror, completed the effect of the dazzling circle of the fire. The mistress of all this was a young lady, very pleasant to behold if not beautiful, with a trim figure, pretty hair, pretty eyes, a not too perfect mouth. The pretty eyes were full of expression, good sense, and good feeling. She was dressed quite simply in a white cashmere gown, it being winter and cold, with few ornaments and no finery of any description—a nice girl dressed for house and comfort, and looking the very symbol of both. But in this great room, and amid all these many appliances, she was alone. Her mother had died some three or four years before. She had neither brother nor sister. Mr Thursley had remained, as he generally

did after dinner, down-stairs. Madeline and Gervase were alike in being the only children of their fathers.

They resumed with eagerness the interrupted conversation of the afternoon, when he had not told her, nor she elicited, by a hundred questions, half there was to say after a three months' absence, especially as all his impressions of America, what he thought of that wonderful New World, what friends he had met and made, were among the things he had to tell. It must be said, however, that it was she who resumed that talk, saying quickly, "Come now and tell me all about it. You left off just when you were leaving New York."

"Yes," he said, not at all eagerly on his part. "How long was that ago?"

"How long? Why, Gervase, have *you* taken to absence of mind? I suppose it must have been about eight or nine weeks ago."

"I told you everything in my letters, Madeline."

"Yes, yes, I know. Letters are very nice when you are away; but when you are here it is so different. I want it all by word of mouth."

"Maddie, when I say how long was it, I mean how long since I came back, since I was last here."

"Gervase!"

"I have not gone mad, dear. I have only had a long talk with my father, and had the earth cut from under my feet. I don't know where I am—floundering somewhere in mid-air."

She grasped his hand, which was holding hers in a loose and languid clasp, tightly, suddenly, and said in a quick, almost imperative tone, "You are here, Gervase, by my side—tell me what you mean."

"So I am," he said, looking at her with a startled air; "a very definite place, which nobody but myself has any right to. Thank you, my dearest, for recalling me. I will tell you—not what I, but what my father means."

He repeated to her the conversation which had terminated only half an hour before—or at least the gist of it—with tolerable faithfulness. He scarcely, perhaps, conveyed to her mind the sensation of astonishment with which it had burst upon his own, that to his father he was not all in all, or the possibility which had arisen

that he might not get everything he wanted. He perhaps a little slurred over these revelations, but he said enough to reveal to her that his father had not been "kind," that the conversation had not been a pleasant one, and that Gervase for the moment was not at all certain what might be going to happen—that he had, in short, received a check, which was a thing to which her existence as well as his recorded no parallel. Madeline was more surprised than alarmed.

"Of course," she said, "he has always calculated on having you in the business. I don't wonder that he was disappointed; even I," she added with much gravity, "did not know that you were so set against it, Gervase—I wonder why?"

"You need not wonder, Madeline. I have told you often I loathe it from

beginning to end. Buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest is not an axiom for me. And I think, perhaps, I hate trade more since I have seen it on the other side. They don't care there for our decent veils. Profit is the visible god. The means by which they pursue him and his rites, are more candid than among us. It was uncongenial before — it is anti-pathetic now."

"And yet we have always been business people since we were—anybody," she said. "Do you think we've been doing wrong all the time? All this comes of trade—every penny we have. If it is so bad that you will not follow it, shouldn't we give up all that we have? for it has all been purchased in the same way."

This speech startled Gervase not a little.

"I have always heard," he said, with a sort of admiring dismay, "that women carried a conclusion further than men, being less artificial, less complicated——"

"That is the kind of praise that means contempt."

"Oh no, far from contempt; but I don't go so far. I think the methods of trade were very likely better when our money was made. Our grandfathers did things in a better way. They did not make such haste to be rich—they were honourable, straightforward——"

"Gervase!"

"What have I said wrong?"

"You spoke as if papa, my father——"

"No, no, no," he said. "I was thinking of my own, who is as honourable a man as any one. But only—they don't think it

necessary to carry that into trade, Madeline. I don't mean to say anything I oughtn't to say. I suppose they don't go into every detail. They leave a great deal to—clerks and people. Every transaction is not carried on as it would be between two men—of the same social grade—under the eyes of all the world. I don't know how to explain it. I don't blame my father; but I—couldn't do it. I could not—I could not. You know you and I have been brought up in another sort of a way. If that is what they meant, they shouldn't have done it."

"Done what?" she asked.

"Well, given themselves the final luxury of children brought up like—like a king's sons. My father taunted me with having everything that a prince

could have had—so I have—and the feelings too——"

"Are princes so much superior to other people?" she said, with a faint smile almost of anger. She was more faithful to her caste than he had ever been, priding herself upon being a merchant's daughter; although, to be sure, she knew nothing about trade—no more than a princess, no more than her lover had done.

"Perhaps not," he said; "but people in trade do strange things—things that you and I wouldn't do, any more than princes. *They* don't think of it. It is not dishonesty, oh no, no—it is only—I can't condemn my father, much less yours; but I can't do as they do—I can't. You must not think I have been hasty. It's impossible."

There was a little pause. She sat with her head averted, staring into the fire, as people are so apt to do when they want enlightenment. He was seated on a lower seat close to hers, holding her hand, which she did not withdraw from him. His mind was so full of what he was saying, and of the contrariety and new discovery he had made in his own circumstances, that he did not remark that she was taking his revelation with what was at the least some uncertainty—not throwing herself into it as she usually did into his views.

"Then I suppose," she said slowly at last, "that this changes many things — and makes the future perhaps — different."

"Would you have anticipated that?" he said quickly. "I suppose then I must be a fool, for I never expected him to mind."

"Gervase! how could he help minding —after looking forward, ever since you were born, to having you to succeed him, to leaving you — at the head of a great business?"

"You seem to sympathise with my father, Madeline, more than with me."

"I do—a little," said Madeline. "I am sorry for everybody who is disappointed. I don't wonder if he was vexed. And what then are you going—to do?"

Gervase laughed aloud, but with a little discomfiture in his voice. "Just what my father said; and you will be as much disgusted perhaps as he was, when I say, Nothing. Why should I do anything. Listen to me, Madeline, before you condemn me. This doing something is a modern fad, just like all the others. There

are hundreds of men who must work to live. Why should I get in their way, and take some one's bread out of his mouth?"

"Gervase! not one of them could take your place. Not one of them could do what you were wanted to do."

"That is just what my father said." He gave vent to a short laugh, embarrassed and uneasy. "You ought to back me up, or what is to become of me? This makes it all the harder to tell you—of the future, as you said."

"Yes, Gervase." She gave the hand that held hers a little pressure, a touch that meant much.

"Well," he cried, with a burst of wounded feeling, anxiety, doubt, disappointment, all in one, "that is just what gives it its sting. 'You cannot marry,'

he tells me, 'on your boy's allowance:' which means that I am to have nothing more: that I have to offer you—nothing! not the kind of life that you have been living—nor luxury nor beauty, nor—anything we have thought of. But only a poor man's pittance—a sort of starvation—a—nothing! nothing! and after all our dreams."

She gave his hand a little pressure again. "Don't be extravagant," she said. "Do you think I would hesitate—if——"

"If what?"

"If there was any need for it?" she said.

And then again there was a pause. This time it was he who averted his head, gazing straight before him into the vacant air, while she looked at him an-

xiously. After a while he replied in a cold constrained tone,—"The need—exists in my own mind. I am very unfortunate not to be able to make you understand it. That takes all support from me. But it does not change me. There is need—in my eyes." He paused again. "I have made a very bitter discovery already to-night, that my father is guided by other sentiments than love and generosity to his only child. That he wants a recompense—his pound of flesh."

"Oh, Gervase, don't talk of it so!—is it not reasonable—his only child?"

"Yes, his only child—that is what I thought. I believed he would respect the scruples he has himself had me trained to. I never thought it was an affair of

bargaining between us. And now he has made it so, and, Madeline, you——"

"Gervase!" she cried, in great trouble, "do you think I will forsake you because your father will not give you what you expected? Oh no, no! I would rather have you with nothing than anybody else with the whole world in his hand. Surely you know that well enough. What do I care for the luxury and all that? Why, you know I have often said there would be far more fun in being poorer, in doing things for ourselves, contriving and patching up like the people in books—— But one may have one's opinion all the same."

"And that's all against me," he said.

"I don't know that it's all against you. Perhaps there is something in what you

say. I always thought a British merchant—— But perhaps the times have changed since that. And I never looked on business with that sort of eye before. I am glad," she said a little feebly, with an effort, "that you can make—such a sacrifice—for your conscience, Gervase."

"You must have had a poor opinion of my conscience, Madeline."

She made no reply to this, but with a sudden exclamation, cried, "I foresee we shall have dreadful trouble! I suppose you have never thought of my father, Gervase?"

Their eyes met, and the dismay in each was so ludicrous to the other, that the immediate result was one of those fits of laughter in which many a moment of

youthful despair has culminated. "You look such a picture of despair!" she cried. And he was fain to laugh too, though with a deeply burdened mind.

CHAPTER III.

As Gervase left the house Mr Thursley came in, and they exchanged a few words on the stairs, to the distant sound of which Madeline listened with considerable anxiety. Her father had a position in the matter which her lover had not thought of. But she, who knew him better, was very well aware that he would permit no such rash marriage as Gervase suggested. Mr Thursley, like his class, believed in money. He had no confidence in the vague hopes of ro-

mantic youth; and how his opinion of Gervase would be affected by the young man's new resolution, his daughter scarcely liked to inquire. He had not at any time entertained a high opinion of Gervase, so far as sense and stability went. He had disapproved his education wholly, though he had himself given a sort of parallel education to his own child. It was his opinion that it did not matter about a woman, but that a man should be brought up to his business, without any nonsense about it. In all likelihood, had he possessed a son, he would have yielded like Mr Burton to the temptation of giving that son the best of everything, and himself the pride of knowing that no gentleman's son in England was more highly trained. But

Mr Thursley had not been exposed to this temptation, and he thought he would have been superior to it. It was only half-a-dozen words which passed between him and his intended son-in-law, and then Madeline, breathless, listened to his heavy step coming up-stairs. She would have to tell him everything that had been told to her—and how would he take it? Would he put his veto immediately upon the union? Would he forbid her to think of Gervase more? This was quite possible, Madeline knew. Being herself, however, a young woman of the nineteenth century, and quite indisposed to give up the will which had been so carefully developed and cultivated, she also knew that if prohibition was possible, obedience was not, and that some means

of reconciling matters must be the present aim of all her thoughts. She was far from having any rebellious inclination to defy her father. It would be painful to her even to disobey him; but to give up her own life and future, was entirely out of any reckoning which this girl of the period had ever made. At the same time, she neither meant to defy nor to vex her father if she could help it. This is an age of compromises, and she did not fear that some practicable arrangement, some way of managing matters, might be attained.

He came in with nothing in his face from which his mind could be divined, looking just as usual, having come back from that "look-in" at his club, which was one of the habits of his widowed life,

formed before Madeline had grown up to bear him company. He said the night was cold, and gave a quite unnecessary poke to the blazing fire, and sat down in his usual chair. Not till he had gone through all these manœuvres and stretched out his long limbs for a minute or two in enjoyment of the blaze, did he speak. "You have had young Burton with you again, I see," was his utterance when at last he spoke.

"Of course, papa. I had no more than a peep of him before."

"Well," said Mr Thursley, with a laugh, "a peep of him would have sufficed for me. I suppose he was telling you all about America?"

"Yes, papa."

"Every young man nowadays thinks he

can fathom a new country with a glance. And what did he think of the Yankees, your young man?"

"Oh, of course, papa, he gives a very different account from that of the old rough time when we thought all Americans Yankees. Of course he likes some things and dislikes others—as one does in every new place."

"You're all so deuced philosophical nowadays — not so much as a good honest prejudice to be met with," said the father. "Well, and any more? How did he like their business ways?"

"From what I could glean, not at all, papa; but we had other things to talk about."

"Oh, to be sure; other things before which the aspect of a great country dwindles into nothing."

"Not that," said Madeline, faltering a little, "but of course more important personally to ourselves."

"That is quite true, my dear; and I oughtn't to say a word. Of course it's not so pleasant to me as to you; I needn't say I'll miss you,—neither need I say that nothing could make me stand in your way. I suppose you've been settling everything?"

"We should not have been so hasty in any circumstances," she said, with a blush. "But as it happens, we couldn't—settle anything."

"Ah! how's that?"

"I don't know what you will think," said Madeline, doubtfully. "I am a little disturbed myself. Gervase has had a great deal of time to think it all over."

Her father, who had been lying back in

his chair, the embodiment of luxurious repose, in the glow of the firelight, here sat up abruptly, with a start of indignation. "What!" he cried; "do you mean to tell me that the fellow — has thought better of——"

"No, no, no!" cried Madeline, with a flush of mingled shyness and laughter,— "papa, don't be ridiculous, please. What could possibly come between Gervase and me?"

He grumbled, and growled a little, half internally, inarticulately, over the imagined and yet scarcely imagined insult. "I never had your confidence in him, Maddie. Too soft, too soft altogether—no backbone. Not half good enough, not half. Well—what had he got to say?"

"He has had, as I think, papa, too much

time to think it all over; and the conclusion he has come to is——I don't think it will please you; and naturally it has not pleased his father."

"Out with it, child!"

"He can't make up his mind—he can't satisfy his conscience—to go into the business, papa."

Mr Thursley's answer was a long whistle of astonishment. Words seemed to fail him. He got up and stood before the fire till the glare scorched him. Then he threw himself down into his chair again; and then, finally, in tones half of laughter, half of consternation, "Not go into the business! And what objection has he to the business?" he said.

Madeline made no reply. She had not yet found words in which to excuse her

lover, and though her heart rebelled against the laugh, she could oppose nothing to the astonishment, the half dismay, half irritation, with which her father spoke.

"The young idiot," said Mr Thursley; "this is quarrelling with his bread and butter with a vengeance. And what does Burton say?"

"Mr Burton," said Madeline, in subdued tones, "is very angry, and perhaps that's not wonderful——"

"Wonderful! Why, what else could he be?"

"And says, I believe, that except his present allowance, Gervase is to expect nothing more from him."

"I wonder he stops at that! I'd leave him, if he were mine, to try how he liked it—without any allowance at all."

"No, papa; I am sure you would not—after training him—in a way that was sure to end like this."

"Well, there's something in that," said Mr Thursley. "Eton is all very well—and so, no doubt, is Oxford—for scholars or schoolmasters, or people who have nothing to do: but it has always been my maxim, as you know, that a man should be brought up for his business. It's old Burton that is the biggest fool after all."

"Still," said Madeline, with a little impatience, "you brought me up in as nearly as possible the same way."

"You! A girl is quite a different matter. I know what you are going to say, my dear; that girls don't count. That's not what I mean at all. You're a very great luxury, Maddie, the greatest

luxury a man like me can have. Even to hear you discharge your little arrows at business men, and scorn business ways——"

"I never do that," she cried, hastily. "I have always taught myself to think that a British merchant—should be the highest, the most honourable kind of man."

Her father laughed. "Perhaps, on the other hand, that's a little bit high-flown," he said. "A British merchant—as you say—is no better and no worse than other people. But even your high-falutin—and even your little sniffs and scorns—are a luxury to me. Not in a man, though—that sort of thing won't do in a man. A man must stick to his business, make the most of it, earn money enough to indulge

his wife and his daughters to the top of their bent, to have them as fine as they can be made, little *savantes*, critics of everything, as grand in their way as princesses. The women like you, my dear; and the men, stiff old remorseless business fellows like myself, letting nothing stand between us and a good profit."

"Papa, nothing but honour and justice, and even mercy."

He laughed and shook his head. "Well, I don't say by fair means or foul, as some do; but as for mercy, that's not a business-like quality, my dear."

"Oh, don't say so, papa. I am sure you would always be kind. Gervase says that the methods are what he cannot bear —that he always thought, as I did, everything was high-minded and honourable, but

—I suppose he must have found out things: and then he says that, on the other side, profit, mere profit, is the god. He means in America, of course—and to make money the only end; not in your way, but by fair means—or foul, which you said some people—— It might have been different with Gervase if he had known only *your* methods, papa."

This Madeline said, partly out of a true and genuine faith in her father, which indeed was beyond question; but partly also to propitiate him, to make him believe that in his dealings her lover would have found nothing but honour.

"Well," he said, "there's truth in that. I don't know all the outs and ins of Burton's business. There may be things in it which a fanciful young man——I've pointed

out to you before, Maddie, that Gervase was a very fanciful young man, with no end of whims in his head."

"Whatever he is, papa," said Madeline, with a blush, yet a proud erection of the head, "it is certain that he is the only man in the world for me."

"Well, well," said Mr Thursley, "well, well. I had nothing to say against it before, and I don't know that I have anything now. But he must change his mind, you know. He's done it frequently before. He must just have to do it again. My daughter is not going to marry a man with five hundred a-year."

To this Madeline made absolutely no reply.

"You understand," said Mr Thursley, getting up, "that about that there's

nothing to be said. You don't leave this house but for a house as good. You don't go from having everything your own way here, to pinching and scraping and counting your pence in another man's house. Come, Maddie, you are a girl of sense, and you must talk sense to him. What would the pair of you luxurious highly bred young people, wanting everything of the best, what could you do on five hundred a-year?"

"I should have something of my own, papa," she said, with downcast eyes.

"Not from me, Madeline. I should not encourage any such venture by the gift of a sixpence. You would have that ten thousand pounds of course, which your wise aunt left you to make ducks and

drakes with—if you have not made ducks and drakes of it already."

"I have done only what Mr Mentore has advised me to do."

"You're safe enough in old Mentore's hands; but—granted you have that—it would not double your husband's large income. Nine hundred a-year. My dear, what would you do upon that, Gervase and you?"

"I suppose, papa," said Madeline, "there are thousands to whom it would be wealth, in comparison with those to whom it is poverty."

"What does that matter?" he cried. "What does any general rule matter? You are individuals, Gervase and you; and to you it would be poverty. I will not consent to marry my daughter to a

man who has only five hundred a-year, and no prospect of any more."

"Papa," said Madeline, timidly, "his father—would not shut him out for ever. He must be his heir."

"And so must you be my heir," said Mr Thursley. "Do you think it safe to calculate on that? I may not die for the next twenty years."

"Papa!" cried Madeline. "*Father!*" with quick-springing tears in her eyes.

"Yes, yes, I know. You wouldn't grudge me a day of it. But Burton is no older than I am; and to wait twenty years for dead men's shoes is not enlivening. Perhaps, by the way, there is something else your young man means to do," he added, pausing on his way to the door. "Perhaps he has other plans. He may be

going to make his fortune in some other way?"

"I don't know," said Madeline, with some embarrassment. She would not pour forth the full measure of Gervase's iniquity all at once. His conclusion that it was his duty, for the sake of others, to do nothing, had been bewildering enough to herself. She did not feel strong enough to lay bare before her father that strange determination, which was so exceedingly confusing even to her own intelligence.

"He may mean to paint a great picture like Millais, or get a £20,000 cheque for a book like Macaulay," said Mr Thursley, with contempt in his voice.

"You may be sure," cried Madeline, "that even if he were bent upon writing books or painting pictures, he would never

say that. Papa," she added after a moment's silence, "you have so much sense and understanding——"

"Thank you, my dear. I am glad to have your good opinion."

"Oh, don't laugh at me. Papa, if you were to speak to Gervase."

"I don't believe in speaking, Madeline —especially to young men."

"To his father then — to Mr Burton. If you were to speak to him—to suggest something. Surely there are more ways than one way. If Gervase were made to consider; if he were shown things as they are; if Mr Burton would perhaps find some means—— Papa, I don't know what to suggest; but you know. All might be set right, I am sure, if you would but find a compromise."

"Well, my dear, I can't have you cry, that's clear," he said, kissing her. "Good night, Madeline, and go to bed. I'll think what I can do. It can't just rest here."

CHAPTER IV.

It was not till the afternoon of next day that Madeline and Gervase met again. She had spent a very anxious morning. Her father had made no reference at breakfast to the question which was of so much moment to her, though he had gone out with a nod and a look of intelligence which brought the blood rushing back to her heart. Madeline was under no particular illusion about her father. She had not the confidence of some children, that everything was safe

which was in his hands. She believed that he would do for her what he thought to be the best; but she was not entirely certain that it would be the best, as some happy idealists are. She would rather, indeed, have made sure of having her own way than his. But, at the same time, she had little doubt that it was an advantage to have her father actively interfering. He would not do anything unkind. He would not let her be disappointed, if he could help it. Though it would have been better to have all things go well without his interference, yet, things having gone wrong, his interference was more likely than any other to be of use. This was not a very assured and stable comfort, and yet it was a comfort in its way.

But she was very anxious all the morn-

ing. She was anxious, expecting Gervase every moment to rush in, to bring her the report of some further interview not more satisfactory with his father. When Gervase did not come she became only more anxious, thinking of him as perhaps summoned to some solemn conference with the two fathers, and impatient under their admonitions. He would almost certainly be impatient. They would sneer at him in a way which it would be impossible for his quick temper to bear. They would goad him with little taunts, such as they were both so capable of employing, and which they would declare meant nothing except in the boy's fancy, after they had nearly made him crazy with them. Oh why are fathers and parents generally so hard, so mocking and taunting, and chil-

dren so susceptible? She thought that she herself (in reality the most tenderly guarded of daughters) was almost invulnerable to that sort of thing, knowing how to take it—but Gervase! So that Madeline grew more and more anxious as the hours went on, not knowing what to think.

It was not till about four o'clock in the afternoon that Gervase came. She had pictured him in so many aspects of excitement—angry, harassed, exasperated, impatient, despairing—that it was almost a disappointment to her to see him walk in very much like himself—a little more grave than usual perhaps, but perfectly self-possessed and calm. He even paused to speak to the elderly visitor with whom she was hurriedly shaking hands, anxious only to get her away. Gervase said to Mrs

Brown that he was glad to see her, and asked for her sons and her daughters, companions of his childhood, while Madeline stood tingling, not knowing how to bear the suspense. He walked down to the door with that old woman! leaving her almost beside herself with desire to know what had happened. He came upstairs again in quite a leisurely way, not taking three steps at a time as she had seen him do. "Well?" she said, meeting him at the head of the stairs.

It was true he put his arm round her to lead her back to the room, but he did not satisfy her anxiety. "Well?" he said. "No, I don't think it is well, nor ill either, perhaps; it is nothing—it is a compromise."

"But, Gervase, in the state things had

got to, that *is* well," she cried, drawing a long breath, "the best we could hope for. Was it papa!"

"I can't tell you, Madeline. He is in it somehow, but in what way I don't exactly know. I think my father had determined upon it before he appeared."

He had led her to her seat, and placed her in it, and seated himself beside her; but he did not seem to have any desire to say more.

"You forget you have not told me what it is, Gervase."

"No; I feel as if it were mere aggravation, without any meaning in it. I am to be sent away again."

"To be sent away!"

She, too, felt as if it did not much matter what the new arrangement was.

"Not, as before, for mere experience' sake. This time I have got a definite piece of work to do. They say I need not be more than three months gone."

"Three months!" She looked at him with eyes full of dismay, and he returned the gaze with the blank look of a discouraged certainty beyond appeal.

"Yes," he said; "it's a poor thing to have to accept, after all we've been thinking of. But, I suppose, it will have to be done whether we like or not."

"It could not be papa!" cried Madeline, with tears springing to her eyes.

"I can't tell; I think my father had decided upon it before. It is supposed to be a test whether I have really scruples (which they laugh at), or am merely idle, which is what they believe. I tell them to

take the worst view—to say I am merely idle. I am, for that matter."

"No, Gervase; not if you had worthy work to do——"

"What is worthy work? I don't want to work at all. It is perfectly true: I think it my duty to be idle; but that is what they don't understand, nor you either, Madeline. I can find a thousand things to do which are not work, but which occupy me. I ought not to do anything else if I am to fulfil my *rôle* of a rich man's son."

"Gervase, I know what you mean; but it sounds a little fantastic, don't you think —at least to their ears?"

"Perhaps; they are of their generation, and we are of ours," said the young man. He was not proud, not to call proud,

though he was conscious of occupying a higher standing-ground than "they" did. "They" were the parents — the older set — whose views were exploded, and their prejudices old-fashioned; but whom, nevertheless, both these young people felt it to be their duty to respect. After a little interval he began to tell her what his mission was to be. The house had certain property in the West Indies, from which for many years no profit had been obtained. This was chiefly in consequence of the condition into which the islands had fallen; but partly also because Mr Burton himself had never had the time to look into the matter, to set things right on the spot, which it appeared was the right way. To get a proper account of all that the respective agents

—changed from time to time, but each falling back into his predecessor's ways —had been doing; to ascertain the real state of the property: how much its value had deteriorated, whether it was now really worth anything at all in a mere pecuniary point of view, was to be the mission of Gervase. The most high-minded could not say of it that it was an unworthy mission—nor could he deny that it was one which his father's son was better qualified for than any stranger. And at the same time it was to be a test of his real mettle. If he did this well, why then, his father would yield a point, and his allowance at least be so far increased as to permit the young people to marry. And perhaps the pleasure of definite work, of accomplishing something which really

wanted to be done—of sounding his own capabilities—might change his ideas about work altogether. This was perhaps what "they" most hoped. And Madeline hoped it too, though she said nothing, and though Gervase smiled a little at the idea of a well-considered decision of his own being so lightly done away with. They talked each other finally into a certain acceptance of this mission—finding that it was on the whole a thing rather fine than otherwise, to go off like an adventurer prince to recover the almost lapsed territory and emancipated subjects. "You may be able to throw some new light upon the subject of emancipation," Madeline said: "if you could only find some means of rehabilitating poor Quashee, Gervase! and making him a human possibility again." "There

is no doubt great need of some independent opinion on that subject," Gervase replied. This was a wonderful comfort to them, after they had fully familiarised their minds with the idea of a new separation —which was hard, after having so long believed that Gervase's American expedition was to be the last, and that their marriage was to follow immediately on his return. Though they were so superior in many respects, they were in others just like any other young couple suddenly checked in the midst of their hopes, and thrown back upon the indefinite. It was very hard, after settling to what enchanted places they were to go together hand in hand as soon as their wedding was over, to unclasp their hands and consent to part. For three months! Three months is not

a very long time; but when once a parting has been made, who can tell when and how it is to end? Delays come in so easily, so inevitably, when there are thousands of miles of land and sea between two people who love each other. After they had freed themselves for a moment from the immediate burden in that little outburst about emancipation and Quashee, they sat and looked at each other again with wistful eyes.

"Must it be, Gervase? Must it be?"

"It seems so," he said, clasping her hands. "Our last trial, Madeline."

"Oh, how can anybody tell if it will be our last trial? I thought so when you went to America, though that was no test or task, but only pleasure."

"If we parted bravely for nothing at

all then," he said,—"for there was no motive—and I can't think why I went and left you, not being forced to do it,—we must try and part all the more bravely for a real motive now."

"Oh, I shall not break down; you need not fear for me. But it is hard, Gervase."

"The only comfort is, that when they have exacted this, there is nothing more for them to do."

"Oh, they'll find something!" Madeline cried: and then her heart smote her for her father, who was always so kind. "Papa will always stand our friend," she said.

It was his turn now to shake his head. He did not think her father had been kind, any more than his own. They had laid their heads together; they had not

cared for crushing the hearts of their children. Granting, as Gervase did, that it is only young hearts that can feel, the ingenuity of the fathers in tearing him from Madeline, in separating the two who ought to have been made one, had something in it wellnigh diabolical. He forgot that they had been sundered before at their own will and for pleasure merely, without any idea of duty. His American expedition had not pretended to any elevated motive. He had gone because he wanted to go, and Madeline had quietly encouraged him so to do; but there had been no suggestion of diabolical ingenuity or of tragical feeling. Now it was all different. The two fathers had laid their heads together. They had taken advantage of the younger pair.

"Is it to be soon?" asked Madeline.

"The sooner the better," he replied. "The sooner I am gone, the sooner I shall be back again. Three months is not so very long after all. I shall be back soon after the New Year."

"Another Christmas without you," she said, a tear dropping from her eyelashes. Last Christmas it was she who had been away on the Riviera enjoying a relief from the wintry greyness of London. They had not thought of upbraiding each other with these absences. But everything was different now.

"It will not be a very merry Christmas for me," he said.

"There is only one thing that comforts me," said Madeline: "that you must clear this subject up — about the negroes, Ger-

vase. Coming to it quite clear-headed, quite impartial—without any prejudice or *parti pris*——"

"Well, there is something in that," he said.

"And if the sacrifice of our happiness should contribute to other people's well-being—one could bear it—better——"

"Not the sacrifice, darling—only the postponement,—if it were to be sacrificed, not all the Quashees in the world could console me,—say postponed."

"Well, postponed—but one never knows what postponement may bring. A thousand things may happen. Oh, forgive me, Gervase! I am silly and superstitious."

"Have you been dreaming any dreams or seeing any visions?"

"No, no—it's only—silliness," said

Madeline, hiding her tears upon his shoulder. The contradiction to which they were so unaccustomed was very bitter to them. It was so strange, that they should want something very much, and not get it, but only disappointment and separation in its stead.

Mr Thursley came in with a certain air of having done well, in the evening. "Well," he said, "don't you think I've managed famously for you? Gervase has only to give himself a little trouble to make a very good thing of this West Indian business. I've reason to believe it is not at all so bad a business as most of those Jamaica affairs have been. If he winds it up judiciously and sells it well, there will be a very pretty balance to bring home; and between you and me,

Maddie, it's all for himself—for him and you. What! crying? and in the name of wonder, child, what are you crying about?"

"Do you think it is nothing, papa," cried Madeline, flashing upon him through the tears that stood like dew on her eyelashes, "to separate us again—to take him away? For three months."

"God bless me!" cried the astonished man. "Is this all you have to say to me, after what I've done?"

"I don't know what you may have done. He thought his father had determined on it before you came in. But it is hard to be separated just when we thought we were going to be always together. And to send Gervase away on a wild-goose chase."

"On a wild-goose chase!" he repeated with dismay. "I should have thought you would have been delighted with such an opportunity of doing some good work."

"When all he is allowed to think of, is how he is to get the most money, and make the best bargain!" she cried.

Poor Mr Thursley felt very small after this taking down. He thought it would perhaps have been better to leave the young ones to themselves, to do what seemed good in their eyes.

CHAPTER V.

GERVASE BURTON soon discovered that to get home in three months was quite beyond his powers. He had calculated without his West Indies. He did not know the ways of that much-delaying, *far niente*, tropical place. Half-a-dozen times, when he thought that he had completed all his arrangements, he discovered that he had to begin from the very beginning again. The three months grew into six. The height of the tropical summer was reached, but still he did

not get away. At the last moment he had to put off his departure for two different mails. At last he really did conclude all his business, and in a moderately successful way. The Burton plantation had continued to be one of the few successful ones; and its affairs were pulled out of confusion and established on a better footing, and everything wound up, before the young man could complete the sale which was the crown of his efforts. He did so successfully at last in the beginning of May, and, with the values which he had received in payment of the estate safely disposed of, part of them to be remitted to London, part carried with him, had the satisfaction of taking his place in the mail-steamer. His correspondence had been interrupted for some weeks previous to this,

successive delays having made it impossible for him to receive his letters regularly as at first; and it was accordingly with a double eagerness for home, as knowing very imperfectly what might be going on there, that he set out at last.

His chief correspondent during this period of exile, it is needless to say, had been Madeline. His father had written from time to time; but Mr Burton did not pretend to keep up anything beyond a business correspondence. His first communication had informed Gervase that he had taken his advice and made young Wickham a partner in the house, an intimation which had a curious effect upon the young man. By some extraordinary inconsistency he did not like it! It made his heart beat in his breast uneasily, with

a sensation almost of pain. He thought instinctively of what Madeline had said that the vacant place was not for the first comer, it was for himself and no other. He had rejected it, and he had advised that Wickham should have it; but when it was done according to his advice, he was not pleased. These contradictions of nature are ridiculous, but still they happen from time to time. After that he heard little from his father, and, with unfounded acrimony, set this down to Wickham's influence,—Wickham, who had always been almost servile in devotion to him, and who, no doubt, was quite aware to whom he owed his elevation.

Madeline's letters were always regular by every mail—always long, always sweet, full of tenderness and consolation and news,

and all the comforting details which a woman's letters, but seldom a man's, supply. He did not really require any other correspondent so long as he had Madeline to set everything before him. But for two or three mails even her letters had failed. She had thought him on his way to England while he was still delayed in Jamaica; and though he had let them know by telegraph of his detention, he could not get the letters which had not been written. He started, therefore, at least three weeks behind the current news of home.

Everything went well on the homeward voyage until after the steamer had made its last stop among the island ports, and had at last set out on the full Atlantic, with nothing between it and England save

the wastes of the ocean. The passengers had all provided themselves with the latest papers—chief among them those just arrived by the mail-steamer from home—when they made this last call on their homeward-bound voyage. Gervase had his handful of papers like all the rest, and was reading them with devotion—the politics, the discussions, the literature, the books, amid which he hoped to be in a few days more. There were other portions of the news upon which, perhaps, he did not look with so much interest, or hurried over with a glance.

"I say, Burton," said a fellow-passenger, "is this any relation of yours?" looking up from the paper he was reading.

"Eh? What is it?" Gervase asked, half-hearing. The passenger cast a hur-

ried glance down the page and then said hastily—

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I see it can't be;" and presently hurried away, carrying his paper with him.

Gervase did not give much importance to this quickly stifled query; but when another gentleman on board whom he knew approached him a little later on, and asked, with an exceedingly grave face, when he had last heard from his father, a sudden alarm sprang up in his mind.

"I have heard nothing for some weeks," he said. "I have had to put off sailing for mail after mail before I could get my business done."

"Oh," said the other, "then you have had no news?"

"What is wrong with my father?" cried

Gervase. "I see you know something. Is he ill?"

"I hope not; I hope not indeed. But I know absolutely nothing," his old friend said.

These words made Gervase perfectly sure that something was known, something which he did not know; and it was then he remembered the careless exclamation of the other, "Can this be any relation of yours?" There must evidently be some record of trouble in the papers which nobody would venture to tell him. He hurried to the cabin and found a group there gathered round one who seemed expounding the matter to them. "I believe his son would not enter the office, so he was forced to take another partner—who seems to have brought him to ruin."

"Is it the languid young man who is here?" asked another.

"Hush! don't let everybody hear," said the first speaker. "I don't believe he knows."

Gervase did not ask any questions, but he possessed himself of the papers in silence. It was certain that there must be something there which concerned him deeply. He carried them off to his own cabin, where he could be alone; but it was some time before he could find the particulars he sought. At last he found them. "Great Panic in the City—Failure of the old-established firm of Burton, Baber, & Company." Something suddenly lighted up in Gervase's veins which he had never felt before—the fire of the commercial blood. The word "failure" seemed to strike him like a blow. He devoured

every word. All his old affectation of taking no interest in the business news, of avoiding the money article—what dismal affectation he felt it in this sudden blaze of enlightenment! Failure!—bankruptcy! Heaven above! what idiocy! what childish folly! And now what horror and shame! He turned from one paper to another, reading everything. Recent speculations, for which a new partner was supposed to be chiefly responsible, changing the character of the business, and the downfall of certain firms with which Messrs Burton, Baber, & Co. were connected, were given as the causes of the bankruptcy, which had taken everybody by surprise, and filled the City with dismay. So respectable a firm; a name so well known and honoured. The catastrophe

had sent a thrill through the whole mercantile community. And then there were calculations as to the firm's power of meeting its engagements. Putting one thing with another, Mr Burton's well-known wealth and the fact that the embarrassments were of very recent origin, one paper ventured to believe that the creditors would lose but little; while another stated even the possible amount of the composition—15s. in the pound at the least, for Mr Burton had declared his determination to give up everything. All this Gervase read like a man in a dream. To think that it should be his father, his house, his honour, which were thus being discussed, and he to know nothing! To think that such trouble should overcome his family and he be far away, unable to give any help!

And the horror of knowing nothing, of having received no warning, of being, as it were, left out altogether, affected Gervase as perhaps nothing else could have done. Those mails which he had been obliged to miss, one after another; the long interval which now separated him from all knowledge of his home; the apparent blank of silence which had fallen even between him and Madeline, and which it was almost impossible not to connect in some way with the misfortune that had befallen his family, seemed at once to paralyse and to madden. And he could not quicken the pace of the ship, which was exposed to all the exasperating delays of wind and tide; nor lessen the breadth of the pathless sea, which lay blank between him and those who needed him. In one only of the

newspapers was there any reference made to Mr Burton's son, who was believed to be in the West Indies on the business of the firm, but who was not spoken of as likely to affect its fortunes, one way or other. He was left out of all the calculations—an individual of no practical importance. And Wickham, the man whom his father had taken in at his suggestion, the interloper put in his place, supplanting the son of the house (Gervase did not reflect by what astonishing breaches of all logic and unconscious perversions of fact he thus brought himself to describe Wickham)—it was he who had ruined and dishonoured the house that had bred him, sheltered him, raised him to the highest trust. And whose fault was it? that of Gervase, and no other; in all things it was he who was to blame.

How to endure the long hours, the long days at sea, the succession of meals and promenades about the deck, and talks and foolish jestings and laughter! He could not shut himself up entirely from the intercourse which on shipboard it is so difficult to escape; but the crackling of thorns under the pot would not have been half so vain, as the foolish, vague conversation about nothing, the feeble pleasantries at which everybody laughed, seemed to Gervase. The flirtations and the love-making, in which he had taken a certain amused interest, seemed now to carry personal offence to him. He was interested in nothing but the record of the sailing—how many knots had been done each day, how many more days must elapse before their arrival. The progress over those blank

illimitable wastes is so difficult to realise, every day seeming like yesterday; no difference in the weltering waters, no new feature to show that there is any real advance, the turn of a wheel nearer home. To do him justice, it was of his father alone Gervase thought at first, with an aching anxiety to be with him, and a fever of alarm as to the effect that downfall, so unexpected, and, as his son was sure, undeserved, would have upon him. Would it kill him, either body or mind? break his heart, shatter his health, move him with some wild, horrible impulse of despair? Or would it undermine and break down the mind, and turn the clear-headed man of business into imbecility and mental ruin? It might have killed him, it might have driven him mad. Oh for the length

of the days and the slowness of any mortal voyage, whether by land or sea!

Afterwards, however, Gervase had some thoughts of himself and his loss breaking in. He thought of Madeline, who was silent, who in this moment of trouble could not stand by him, with at first an unreasonable sense of desertion, though he knew very well all the time that she had not deserted him; and then he thought of the consolation it would be only to get a sight of her, only to hear her voice, and that she would never forsake him; and then finally, with a leap of his heart, to meet a great exciting danger, of her father. What would his attitude be? Could he be expected for a moment to receive a man who was really penniless? No question now of an allowance, of comparative

poverty, but really poor, without a righteous sixpence in the world; and the son of a bankrupt! "No, no," Gervase said to himself, "not that." A man who was Madeline's father could not descend so far as to say or to think that. Poor father, betrayed by his son! Unhappy son, who had abandoned his father! Thus the ring of thought went round again to its beginning, and once more the knell of his family reputation rang in Gervase's ears. A bankrupt, his father! his father, who held commercial soundness so high, a bankrupt! And then the young man would spring to his feet, and rush up to the bridge, and face the wind blowing strong against the ship, and the weltering world of sea, and the monotonous lines of cloud. The vast space seemed never to lessen. One morn-

ing broke after another, with the same hopeless breadth of unmeasured distance; and though the steamer throbbed on and on, and panted and struggled like his own heart, yet the wind was always in the face of the ship, always against him, in a conspiracy to keep him from home.

Poor father! poor father! that was the most persistent thought of all. Would any one be kind to him in his downfall? Would it be understood that it was his son's fault, his only son, who, wretched coxcomb and fool, would not go into the business, would not lend his help to keep the vessel of their fortunes straight, but must needs recommend a false pilot, a traitor, for that post? He could not do justice to Wickham at this stage of his thoughts. He could only think of him as

a traitor, a man who had betrayed his benefactor, and turned all that he ought to have been into all that a man should not be.

And with these seas and billows of thought, now flinging him up, now flinging him down, the monotonous screw went on rumbling and working, and the engines throbbing, against a head wind; and the long horizon spread out, and the distance spread unmeasured, and day followed day, bringing him perceptibly no nearer home.

CHAPTER VI.

NEEDLESS to say, however, that monotonous as the days were, and blank the distance, time and the hour, and that unmelodious screw got through them. Gervase landed at Queenstown, taking with him every newspaper he could collect as he hurried to the railway. But to be sure, all that he could get was the issue of that day, not the now far back numbers which would have carried on the story for which he thirsted. That story was now over; it had ended, and there was no more of it. Burton,

Baber, & Co. had gone down like a stone in that sea of mishaps and misadventure; the public interest had deserted it, and no man spoke of it any more. Gervase, when he came to think, saw very quickly how it was, and called himself a fool to expect anything different; but yet the shock of the disappointment was great. He sat ruminating it as the train dashed along through the silence of the night. It went quickly, making more visible progress than the steamboat, yet was ever slow to the galloping thoughts which were there and back again, impatient of their incompetence to attain any knowledge, a hundred times in an hour. At last he reached London on a mild and misty morning of May. The air was full of a quiet drizzle, the pavements wet with the mild innocent rain.

There was nobody to meet him, naturally enough, for nobody knew that this was the day of his arrival. He could not help thinking that had Madeline been arriving, miserable and full of trouble, he would have divined it. He did not even know where to go, in the sudden ignorance which had come upon him of all his own most intimate affairs. He could scarcely expect to find his father still at Harley Street, but this was the only place to which he could go, where he must, at least, find an address, something to guide him. It was miserable to put his portmanteaux into a cab, not knowing where he was to find a shelter; for though he gave Harley Street as his destination, he felt as if he were about to drive vaguely through the cold streets, he knew not whither, in search of some spot

in which he could take refuge. It seemed another day of feverish suspense before he got to the well-known street, where everything looked so terribly the same as usual, as if no change had happened. When he reached the door, and dashing out before the cab had stopped, knocked loudly with a summons that seemed to wake echoes all round, and to go through and through his own aching brain, Gervase had come to the extreme limit of his strength. He felt helplessly that he had no voice left with which to ask the question, "Where has my father gone?"

To his utter astonishment—an astonishment which was at the same time collapse—he found himself gazing speechless into the face of his father's old servant. Gilbert opened to him as he had done a thousand

times, and stood with a faint smile of welcome on his face, holding it wide for him to enter. Gervase could only stand and stare and gasp. The sight of the familiar face, the unchanged aspect of everything, overwhelmed him more completely than the strange and stern novelty which he expected, would have done. A mist came over his eyes. He stumbled in within the shelter of his father's door. "Gilbert—my father?" he said huskily, incapable of more.

"Come in, sir. Come in, sir. I'll tell you — everything. Lord! Mr Gervase, don't faint — that would be worst of all."

"My father?" he said.

"Come in, sir; and let me send away your cab, and get your things; and then

I'll tell you—everything; only go in, for God's sake, and sit down!"

He went in: the house was unchanged, but there was a great silence in it, or so he thought, a sense of vacancy—suspense almost as awful as ever, but his senses coming back to him, and the familiar scene round him restoring his self-control and his strength. He stood leaning upon the mantelpiece, listening to the sound of the portmanteaux placed in the hall, and the cab turning from the door. "Gilbert, where is my father?"—these were the only words he could say.

"You must want some breakfast, Mr Gervase,—something to keep up your strength. My wife's in the house, sir; she'll get you a cup of tea in a minute."

"My father, Gilbert?"

"For anything as I know to the contrary, he's quite well, Mr Gervase—as well as you or me."

"Where is he?" cried the young man. "Is it all true?—and why are you here?"

"There is a great deal as is true, sir. I don't know how much you've heard. Master left me here to wait for you. Everything is settled honourable and straightforward, and no dispersions on character. I was to tell you that the first thing. And the house is yours, sir. Them was master's last words. 'Tell him there's no stain upon his name, and the house is his. Tell my boy that the first thing,' was the last words he said."

"What do you mean by last words? My father is not—he is not—— O God!

is this what I have come home to?" the young man cried.

"He's not dead, sir, if that's what you mean. There's nothing happened to him, so far as I know. He's — he's left town, Mr Gervase; but that's all, sir,—that's all, I give you my word."

"Left town! — where *is* my father? Don't play with me, Gilbert. I'm not a fool, nor a child. Tell me the truth."

"That's the truth, sir, as sure as you live. Master has had a bad time; but he's come out of it all with clean hands, that's what I heard the gentlemen say. He might have begun again next morning, if he had liked. They made him a present of the house, and he's left it to you."

Gervase made an impatient gesture.

"Do I care for the house?—where is my father?" he cried.

"If I was to swear upon the Bible, sir, I could say no more. He has left town. I can't tell you where he is, for he has left no address. He said he didn't want no letters forwarded. Mr Gervase, I am telling you the truth. There has nothing happened to him. He has left town. Some thought it was for the best; and some thought as it was a pity, master being still but a young man, so to speak. If you'd have been here, it'd have given him courage. But it so being as there was nobody belonging to him, and he a bit worn out with all that has happened—and no patience with Mr Wickham, as wanted him very bad to begin again——"

"Wickham! did that fellow dare——"

"Well, sir, even Mr Wickham, though he was rash, had no bad meaning. He's been taken into Boyd Brothers, and they say he's got everything in his hand already——"

Gervaise turned with impatience from these details; except a feeling of fierce impatience with Wickham, who he could not forget was his own nominee, he had no further interest in him, and would rather have heard his name no more. He allowed Gilbert to bring him breakfast, and sat down perforce in that old accustomed place, every corner of which was familiar to him from his childhood, and which was now exactly as it had been for so many, many years; not a chair out of place, not a feature changed, the serious old clock going on steadily upon its habitual march, tick-

ing off every deliberate moment, as when day by day its old master had compared his watch with it before leaving home. Gervase seemed to see his father on the hearth-rug with his watch in his hand—the emblem of punctuality and exactitude—making that daily comparison. Such revolutions in life tell doubly when the former tenor has been so exact and perfectly regulated. Where had he gone? He was not the man to take to wandering, to go abroad, to find refuge in those *banal* places where so many unfortunates hide their heads among the haunts of noisy gaiety and excitement. Gervase could not picture his father in any such scene. He could not imagine him poor, with anything but a lavish expenditure, and the power of doing as he pleased in respect to money

and money's worth. It was far more difficult to account for him when he disappeared than for most men. Amusement was a thing which had no existence for Mr Burton. Without his office, his business occupations, the Exchange, the semi-political, semi-commercial discussions which were his chief intellectual pleasure at his club and his dinner-parties, what could he be or do?

When Gervase had taken what refreshment he could, and made himself presentable, he took his way slowly down the street to see Madeline;—slowly, though he was a man in love and going to see his betrothed—almost reluctantly, though he loved her. He knew that the impression was a false one, yet it was difficult not to feel as if Madeline had deserted him, and

in his present state of mind every interest except one seemed to have failed. A sense of having been beaten and humiliated, which was almost physical as well as mental,—a certain giddiness of mind and brain which affected, he thought, his very powers of walking as well as thinking, and which was only increased and aggravated by the familiar aspect of everything round —so unchanged, so undisturbed, so out of sympathy with his state—possessed him. He seemed to himself to knock against everything, to stumble over the crossings or any irregularity in the pavement; and that the few people whom he met in the morning street turned round after him, either to note his unsteadiness, or to say, "That's Burton's son." He would have preferred to walk on past Madeline's door,

to keep moving mechanically, to go on and on along miles of dull street, where nobody would require him to speak or to take any notice. And it was with almost a painful sense of unwillingness that he stopped at Mr Thursley's door. But it was opened almost before he could knock by Madeline herself, who must have been watching for him, and who rushed into his arms before he could draw breath. "Oh, Gervase, you have come at last!" she cried. "Thank God!"

"Is it anything to thank God for?" he said; "when all the mischief is done; when nothing can be mended? It is like my feebleness to come too late."

"Don't say so—don't say so—it is everything to me," she cried. "Oh, Gervase, I should have met you when you arrived,

but we did not know if you would come by Queenstown. I have been looking out for you since break of day. Papa said you could not have heard, and that it was better not to startle you by any unusual fuss."

"Was he so simple as to think ill news would not travel?" Gervase said, with a faint smile. "Tell me, Madeline, where is my father? Perhaps you know."

"Nobody knows," she said, shaking her head; "but there is no reason why that should be bad news, Gervase. Papa says he quite understands it; he thinks Mr Burton will come back—after a while. He thinks he wants to put a little interval between him and all these events. He says he quite understands his feelings. Gervase——"

"Yes, dear. I can't feel anything, I

can't say anything. I am half paralysed, and half mad. Think how things were when I went away: and to come back and find everything gone—disappeared as if it had never been: the dreadful empty mockery of a house which they say is mine, and my father, and all that he cared for, gone, gone like a dream. Sometimes I think I will go crazy,—everything seems to be whirling and unsteady. I am giddy with pain and confusion and ignorance, and the blank all around."

He held her hand, but loosely, languidly, in a feeble clasp. She grasped his tightly, closely, as if to bring him back to himself.

"All that he cared for is not gone. Let my father tell you. He knows the right thing to say. Oh, Gervase, because you

are in great trouble, don't turn all love and tenderness away!"

"Madeline!"

"Oh, Gervase, if you only knew how I have thought of you night and day! I think I should have gone to you had there been any certainty where you were. I should not have let anything stand in the way, when you were in trouble. Don't turn from me now. Papa is coming back from the office to lunch, on the chance of your arrival. He wants to do everything that is kind. Don't, don't turn from us, Gervase, because you are in trouble, which is only a reason for clinging together. Is it not a reason for clinging together?" she cried, with tears in her eyes.

And poor Gervase felt that he ought to feel above every other sentiment the sweet-

ness of this consolation, for which he had so thirsted and hungered in his long misery at sea; thinking that just like this his Madeline would speak and look. But now that she was there before him, in his arms, speaking like Love itself, looking with eyes full of the tenderest sympathy, he was no longer able to feel anything. He caressed her clinging hand, but his natural impulse would have been to relax his hold, to put it away; not that he loved her less, but that the confusion in his mind, the fevered condition of his whole being, was incapable of any natural or happy sentiment. The miserable change that had come over all his private concerns, the ruin of his family, his father's disappearance, even that curious maddening contradiction, in the midst of all the ruin, of the unchanged house, which

he was told was his, filled up his thoughts, his heart, his very veins, so that there was room in him for nothing else.

Mr Thursley appeared soon after for luncheon, and his coming was a relief. He gave Gervase a coherent account of everything that had happened. Mr Thursley was evidently not without an impression that Burton, Baber, & Co. had been in a doubtful condition for some time; but he described with considerable vehemence the action of young Wickham, the risky transactions into which his impetuosity had drawn his partner, and the extravagance he had committed, his head turned by the greatness of the position which he thought he had attained—evidently with the intention of diverting the mind of Gervase from any unfilial thoughts. When the crash

came eventually, he described how entirely honourable and *digne* the attitude of Mr Burton had been. The ultimate catastrophe had been brought about by the failure of one or two companies with which the house had become connected. Mr Burton had at once placed everything he had at the disposal of his creditors. His books, his private affairs, his property to the last penny, had been made available; and his honourable conduct had been fully acknowledged and warmly applauded. Offers had been made to him, on all sides, of help to begin anew his commercial career; but these offers had been gratefully declined. He had said that he was himself too old for a fresh start, and that his son was not disposed, or perhaps adapted, for a business life. Finally, all had been settled, and as

a proof of their admiration for Mr Burton's conduct and character, the creditors had requested his acceptance of the house and all its contents, upon which no profane hand had ever been laid.

"And the West India money?" Gervase said.

"You had come to no conclusion at the time of the settlement," said Mr Thursley. "The West India estate was personal property. It is a thing that has ceased to count for much in anybody's calculations. Nothing but your sense and true business spirit—let me say so, my boy, whether you take it as a compliment or not—could have made so much of it. Thank heaven, Gervase, it is a nest-egg with which nobody has anything to do."

"Was there no mention made of it, then,

at all? Did nobody know? Was he unaware that he had so much to fall back upon?"

"He was not unaware," said Mr Thursley, uneasily. "He did get your last letter—but not till after the arrangement was made and all settled. He was too glad to think that you—would still have something to depend upon."

"I don't understand," Gervase said, almost rudely; "the arrangement—what does that mean?—was everything paid?"

"Yes; everything was paid—that was demanded. It was all settled—in the most honourable way."

"There is something behind that I don't understand:—settled in an honourable way—all paid that was demanded. What does that mean, Mr Thursley? It sounds like

something equivocal, something not so honest as the words. Tell me, without the commercial slang. I'm too dull to understand."

"That's not very respectful, my young friend."

"Papa, Gervase doesn't mean to be disrespectful. Don't you see that he is *done*, that there is no strength left in him?"

"I mean no harm," Gervase said. "For God's sake, tell me in plain words—was everything paid?"

"I wish you knew a little more of the commercial slang you despise. You will misunderstand what I am about to say. Everything was paid—which it was possible to pay. An arrangement was made which everybody accepted—fifteen shillings in the pound—the next thing to payment in full.

It was all settled and accepted by universal consent."

Gervase got up stupidly from his chair. "I thought there must be some quibble in it," he said, the heavy cloud so lowering over his face that for the moment he was almost, even to Madeline's eyes, unrecognisable. "Will the West India money make it up?"

"Don't be a fool, Gervase," said Mr Thursley, sharply. "Everything, I tell you, is settled. You have no right to interfere."

Gervase stood regarding him blankly: his food was untasted on his plate, the meal not half over. He stood up, unconscious of all the circumstances—unconscious even of Madeline's anxious look dwelling on him. "Will the West India money do it?" he said.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr Thursley would have nothing to do with the further steps which Gervase took. He would take no further interest in such a madman. Had he even employed this money, which had been providentially kept out of sight till Mr Burton's arrangement was made, and of which nobody knew anything—had he embarked in business with it—for there was no doubt now that he had a capacity for business—and made his own of it, and laid the foundations of fortune, and then stepped forward when he was able

to afford it, and paid the balance of his father's debts, the thing might have been permissible enough, and would no doubt have had a very good effect. But to do it now—when instead of having a good effect it would have a bad one, as if Mr Burton had kept back something: whereas it had been the very source of that high appreciation which had made all his creditors his friends, that he had kept back nothing—this was more grievous than words could say. It was Gervase's money, not his father's. He had been sent away to make anything he could of that almost lapsed property, with the understanding that anything he recovered should be his own. And it was all settled, as Mr Thursley repeated over and over again—all *done*—the acquittance signed, the whole matter

laid at rest. Why should he interfere, after his father had completed everything? These arguments were repeated over and over — argumentatively, entreatingly, angrily — but without effect. Gervase was not even intelligent at this crisis of his being. He did not seem to understand. He was like a man dazed and stupefied, unable to comprehend anything but one thing, and with his entire mind concentrated on that, whatever any one might say. No argument or reason had any weight with him, not even the tremulous question of Madeline, who made no attempt to hold him back, except by asking — "Do you think, perhaps, my father is right, and that they might think something has been held back?" "What is that to me?" he had replied; "I must do what

is honest, whatever they think." "Oh, *Honest!*" Mr Thursley cried, with a fierce little laugh of indignation and contempt. As a matter of fact, Gervase did produce an effect which was not good so far as public opinion was concerned. Mr Burton had been almost canonised for his honourable dealing, his openness and frankness, the "every assistance" which he had given to the liquidators, and that certainty, which everybody had, that nothing had been kept back. But it came to pass exactly as Mr Thursley had predicted, when the matter was re-opened. The creditors who had got three-fourths of their debts indeed got the whole, and were so much the better off, and had their mouths closed for evermore. But the world in which Mr Burton and his

transactions were known, and which had given him so much credit for keeping nothing back, now discovered to its amazement that something had been kept back, and had all its usual suspicions awakened. And even the creditors scarcely thanked Gervase. He put them in the wrong, making them feel that they had been premature in their applauses. They looked back upon their accounts suspiciously, to see whether old Burton, after all, had not in some way got the better of them.

As for Gervase himself, he was entirely absorbed by this business. He went, indeed, to Madeline for sympathy, and told her all that was happening, and how he was tormented and kept in pain by the innumerable delays and all the vexatious fuss and formality through which he was

dragged before his business could be accomplished. The renunciation of all the money, which had indeed been gained by his own exertions, cost him nothing. He did not think of it; but the waiting, the confabulations, the meetings that had to be called, the papers that had to be signed, the special consent on all hands to make the transaction as odious and as tiresome as possible, did affect him, and that most painfully. He was harassed to death during those early summer days, in which London looks its best, and all the crowd of fashion pours in. Madeline, though her society was not that of fashion, yet had, as everybody has, a greater amount of engagements, a quickened current of life during the season, that high tide of English hurry. And though her

heart was with the lover, who was no longer a lover, who seemed to have forgotten everything, both in the present and the future, except this one dogged resolve to get rid of his money, and silence at once and for ever all criticism or censure, — yet she was compelled to carry on the routine of her usual life, to go out, to lose herself more or less in the bustle and commotion of the period, and could not be entirely at his command, as he seemed to expect. In short, there fell between them, if not a cloud, yet a mist which veiled each from the other, making Gervase believe that her sympathy had failed, and tormenting Madeline with the thought that his love was no longer what it was, and that she had lost her place in his life. He came to her, but he talked

of nothing but his business, of the stage at which he had now arrived, of the prospect there was of coming to a conclusion. And she had so often to hurry on these long explanations, to say "Gervase, I must go. Don't think me unkind,—I would rather stay with you a thousand times, but I *must* go." He would give her a look which she scarcely understood, whether it was reproach or consent. "I know, I know," he would say, and go off heavily, never looking behind him. This lasted like a fever for weeks: he always absorbed in the business which it was so difficult to get done with; she full of wretched thoughts, thinking she had lost him, not without a feeling that he had lost himself, going on with her gaieties, which was worse. If it had but hap-

pened at another time of the year, it would not have been quite so bad; and oh, if Gervase had but stayed at home, if he had but gone into the business, if he had kept everything straight, if it had never happened at all!

There came a time, however, in the middle of June, when all the entertainments were at their height, and Madeline, with a distracted mind, going "everywhere," so far as her circle extended, doing all her father's society duties and her own, keeping "in the swim," as he insisted she should do, was more occupied than ever—when Gervase at last got his business completed. She heard that he had come several times when she could not see him, retreating from the door when she had visitors, or turned away

when she was out. To her horror and dismay, several days elapsed thus without a meeting. She felt that at any moment she might receive a letter saying that Gervase had gone away, that he had left England, that she should see him no more. She went and came to her parties, to her engagements, at the highest tension, terrified to see upon the hall-table every time she came in the note which would pronounce this doom. Her little notes to him remained unanswered. She was told by the servants that he had called, but had not remained or left any message. Madeline's anxiety and trouble had risen to fever-heat. He came on Sunday afternoon at last, but he was scarcely seated when some wretched partner of the night before drifted in to talk

about Lady C.'s ball and the great garden-party at Valley House, and the Lord Mayor's *fête* at the Mansion House, while Gervase sat silent, taking no share in the vain, exceptionally vain, talk. He departed, with a hasty touch of her hand, and a murmur of "I'll come again," when another and another stranger arrived to discourse on the same enthralling subjects. "To-night," she whispered desperately, not able to contain herself; "to-night—I shall be alone to-night." What did it matter who heard her? He nodded, she thought, though he did not look at her, and went away, leaving her to the exhilarating task of that talk about society, which is much the same whether your horizon is bounded by the Foreign Office or by the Mansion House. The

interval was terrible to her till all those Sunday triflers had departed. She told her father at dinner, fearing lest he might think it his duty to give her his company on the Sunday evening, as he often did, that she expected Gervase. "Oh," said Mr Thursley, elevating his eyebrows. "I have scarcely seen him," Madeline said, unable to contain the turmoil of her feelings, "for a week."

"Oh," said Mr Thursley again, "the less you see of that madman the better, it appears to me."

"I hope you don't believe, papa," cried Madeline, "that anything that has happened has changed my feelings."

"I am very sorry to hear," said Mr Thursley; "it has changed his, I am pretty sure. And if he thinks he

is to hook on to you now for a living——"

"You don't seem to see that you are insulting me as well as Gervase," she said hastily; then added, in a subdued tone, "I beg your pardon."

"It's time, I think; but never mind," said her father. "I can allow for your feelings, Maddie—distracted by that fellow and his fancies; but mind, I'll not stand that, whatever he may say now."

Madeline made no reply. Fathers perhaps will never learn to relinquish that kind of remark. Mr Thursley was as well aware as any one that it was a futile kind of thing to say; but he had been watching his daughter closely, and he thought he saw that Gervase's conduct had shaken her trust in him. It was as well, perhaps, to throw in

a word to help the adverse impression; but he did not attempt to hinder the meeting. He went out himself to one of the houses where there was music or conversation going on on Sunday evening, and left the coast free.

Madeline went up-stairs to the drawing-room with a beating heart. She thought, like her father, that Gervase had thrown off all softer feelings in the shock of family downfall and overthrow. What so likely to stun and paralyse a young man with a strong sense of honour, and with that innate conviction of personal superiority to all rebuffs and slights of fortune which an English youth's education gives! Poverty would not have hurt him; but this mingling of doubt and mystery and intricate confusing business, the perhaps undeserved

applauses of which his father had been the object for his partial just dealing, the certainly undeserved suspicion and blame of which he had himself been the object for completing that justice, the sense of the foundations of the earth shaken, and the ground failing under his feet, which such revelations are apt to bring, — all these things were enough, and more than enough, to upset the fine balance of a mind more delicate than strong. It had never appeared that Gervase was strong. His fastidiousness, and what had appeared, even to Madeline, over-delicacy in respect to the business, augured but little fortitude to resist actual calamity. She had in her own heart, with a pang which there was no possibility of ignoring, come to much the same conclusion as her father, that Ger-

vase's love had not been robust enough to withstand the change of all his other conditions. She did not, indeed, believe, nor did Mr Thursley believe, that any interested motive would induce Gervase to pretend a sentiment which no longer existed. But she waited with little doubt as to what he would say to her when he came, with a faint hope indeed still flickering at the bottom of her heart, but no expectation that she could feel to be reasonable. He would tell her, she had little doubt, that he was going away to the ends of the earth, perhaps back to the West Indies, perhaps to America, where he had made so many friends.

It was a warm evening, only half dark: the windows were all open, the spacious room scarcely lighted, in a soft twilight fit

for the talk of lovers, not very fit, Madeline felt, for the sterner communication which she looked for. She flitted about like a ghost in her white dress, hesitating whether she should not light candles or ring for additional lamps. She was still doubting when Gervase came up-stairs. She could hear him coming up, unaccompanied by any servant, and with a quickened step, which made her heart beat still more quickly. The stillness of the room, the faint light, and her evident solitude, which made her afraid, gave Gervase courage.

"Madeline, you are waiting for me?" he said.

"Surely, Gervase—I hoped—that you were sure to come."

"You might have known I would come." He made her sit in the chair where he

had throned her so often, and drew a lower one to her feet. "Thank heaven that at last I have you to myself! And thank heaven it is all over and done with, this horrible business that has stood between us!"

"It has stood between us, Gervase."

"Horribly! but now I feel again my own man,—every penny is paid."

"And you have nothing, Gervase."

"I have the house—which of course I must sell, and all that is in it. That will leave me a few thousands better than nothing. Madeline, what will your father say? I do not ask—perhaps I ought—what do you say?"

"Gervase—I thought you had ceased to mind what I thought."

"Ceased to mind! I never minded so

much. If I wanted you before, Maddie, I want you ten thousand times more now. Don't you understand, how the worst of it all was, that this abominable business absorbed me, enthralled me, so that I could think of nothing else. Now it is over, for ever and ever, thank God. Cease to mind! *You* never thought that."

She gave his hand a little pressure, a mute apology, and all the heavy clouds that had been veiling her horizon flew away like mists before the winds.

"But," he said, pillowing his cheek upon that soft hand, leaning upon her with a sense of indescribable rest and consolation, —your father? What are we to do? how are we to manage? I see all the difficulties. I grudge you to a poor man as much

as he does — but I cannot give you up, Madeline."

"Nobody asked you," she said, with a smile. Madeline felt that she would break down altogether if she did not keep up the lighter tone.

"And what will he say to a man who has nothing in the world but a house in Harley Street?" Gervase said. What am I to say to him? What am I to do?"

"That is the first question," she said. "What are you to do? The house in Harley Street means—something."

"I can't let it out in lodgings, can I, Madeline?—or take boarders: or set up a school—though many men do that."

"Do you ever think — they say you proved yourself so good a man of business," said Madeline, with hesitation,—"do you

ever think, Gervase, of putting the money —into——"

"Business! I loathe it more than ever," he cried. "I hate the very name!"

Madeline gave vent to a gentle sigh. "My father would be more pleased with that than anything," she said. "Everything, I think, might have been smoothed away. He thinks you did so well — in the West Indies, Gervase."

"Did I do well? fighting against chicanery, dishonesty, fraudulent delays, fictitious excuses, everything that is most abhorrent to an honest man: they think it all fair, that is the worst of it. If they can disgust and sicken you, and make you think that no rights are worth that struggle, then they rejoice. That is their object all the time. A hundred times I was on the

eve of throwing up the whole business, crying, Perish your filthy money! and flying to you to save me from cynicism and misanthropy and scorn of every kind."

"But you did not fly. You stood fast and conquered, Gervase."

"A poor victory," he said, shaking his head, "and one only because they roused the worst part of my nature. I don't know what I might develop into were I to carry on that cursed battle."

"Gervase!"

"I beg your pardon, my dearest. It isn't a blessed battle, anyhow. It enlists all one's worst passions. I began to feel almost that it was a distinction to tell a bigger lie, and cheat worse than my opponent, so long as I got the better of him.

If you were not a rich man's daughter, I think I know what I should do."

"Tell me," she said.

"The house would give us so much income, enough for a backbone, something to fall back upon, pay our little rent, and leave something over for you to pay your milliner's bill, Maddie. Fancy the pleasure of paying for your bonnets! and then—you don't mean to tell me I could not get something to do—writing, keeping accounts, nay, teaching, if necessary. I should not be in the least afraid. But, my love, you are a rich man's daughter, and there is an end of it. I have to satisfy your father—and heaven knows how I am to do it."

"To satisfy him—to a certain point, Gervase. He must not be unreasonable.

He has not absolute power, any more than any other authority. I will speak to him."

"Yes, you must speak to him; but in the first place I must speak. I can't put it all on you. He must hear what I have to say. He will think, and think rightly, that a man who can't speak for himself is not worth much. And I know that he will scoff at what I say. He will tell me to go about my business. What can I do to your father, Madeline, to bring him over to our side?"

She shook her head. "There is only one thing I know, Gervase; if you were to go with your little money into business —it does not matter what——"

He made a gesture of despair. "Can a man ever do well what he hates? But I will not say that. I would rather sweep

the streets. But if there is nothing else for it, for *you*, Madeline——"

They were interrupted by the heavy foot of Mr Thursley coming up-stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr Thursley came heavily up the stair, with intention, not simply to warn the lovers of his coming, but to send before him a certain intimation of the temper of mind, not soft or yielding, in which he was approaching. It was time that this matter should be settled one way or another. He was not thinking sentimentally of what people might call the happiness of his daughter — that is, of letting her have her own way whatever might happen— but, as he thought, wisely, judiciously, of

what was best for her, — of her proper establishment in life. He gave them warning, by his heavy deliberate approach, that he had assumed this judicial position, and both of them understood by instinct that it was so. They drew a little apart to prepare for him, and felt that the crisis had come. It must be added, however, that underlying all the bitter excitement of this meeting, and of the father's judgment, there lay a consciousness in all their minds that no judgment could settle the matter; and that after the most serious decision that could be made by the natural authority, there was yet another veto more important, in the will of the person chiefly concerned.

Mr Thursley, however, did everything that was most adapted to impress the

minds of the young people with the idea of a supreme and decisive judgment. He put himself into a great chair, which he drew into the centre of the room, facing them. He rung for another lamp, which changed the twilight of the large room into a circle of full light round the group: and having made these preparations, he bade Gervase speak. "We have all been going on in a sort of happy-go-lucky way," he said; "but this can't last any longer. It will be better for you to tell me what you intend, and where this is to lead to. For Madeline's sake, I feel that it is my duty to interfere."

"I am very glad, sir, of the opportunity," Gervase said; and he made his statement, as he had already made it to Madeline, Mr Thursley listening without

interrupting by a word the concise report. When the young man had ended, there was a brief pause.

"What you have to tell me," said Mr Thursley at length, "is that you want to marry my daughter, a girl accustomed to every luxury; but that having wasted every penny you had, against my advice, in a quixotic and quite unnecessary act, you have now nothing, absolutely nothing——"

"Except the house and its contents, which means——"

"Three or four thousand pounds at the outside—perhaps not so much, making a forced sale, as you will have to do. Is Madeline to live and have a proper maintenance provided for her on the interest, say, of four thousand pounds?"

"I am in your hands, sir," said Gervase.

"No such danger as this seemed possible at the time when we first loved each other. Had I been a poor man then, I should not have presumed to ask Madeline to share my fate. Things have gone against me, without any fault of mine, and now——" He made a momentary pause. Madeline, leaning forward, put her hand upon his. He clasped it tight, and continued, in a more vigorous voice: "The only thing that has not changed is our love for each other,—and nothing can change that."

There are few things more irritating than those signs of mutual agreement between two who are on the other side from that occupied by the judicial authority. Mr Thursley was warmly moved by this irritation and annoyance. He was

left alone in his dignity, while these two conspired against him. He said, with an accent of contempt, made acrid by his daughter's mute adhesion to the foe, "Without any fault of yours!—entirely by your fault, I should say; because, in the first place, you deserted your father; and in the second, because you refused to take my advice,—because your sense of honour, forsooth—and honesty I think you called it—was more keen than mine. Honour, to my thinking," said Mr Thursley, with lowering brows, "should keep a man even from contemplating the idea of living on his wife's money, having none of his own."

Hot words were on Gervase's lips, but Madeline gave a hasty pressure to his hand, and he made no reply.

"Papa," she said, "I appeal to your

good feeling. Are these words to be said to us, in the position we are in?"

"Whom do you mean by 'us'? I am speaking to Gervase Burton, who wants to marry you, a girl with a large fortune, having nothing."

Once more Madeline kept him silent by the pressure of her hand. "We both recognise," she said, "that the position is a difficult one. I can speak better than Gervase, for what can he be but angry when you taunt him in that ungenerous way? Papa, whatever you say, you are our best friend. We are not such fools as to think you are really against us. It is you we must turn to for advice. He has nothing; and I have, thanks to you, a large fortune. We see all the difficulties—what are we to do?"

Her father stared at her for a moment blankly, then he burst into a laugh. "This is turning the tables with a vengeance," he said. "*I* advise you! When it is I that am the offended party."

"Surely Madeline is right, sir," said Gervase; "you are her father, and my friend, since ever I remember anything. If I were in any difficulty, unconnected with her, to whom should I go for advice but to you?"

"By — George!" cried the bewildered father, "you came to me for advice once, or at least I thrust my advice upon you, and a great deal of attention you paid to it! Had you taken my advice then, you would have been in a better position now."

"Papa, you know the trouble he was

in then, half mad with all the strangeness of misfortune. Gervase, let me speak! There is advice that is impossible; if you tell us to separate, to give each other up—I speak for myself—that is impossible. Advise us how we are to live, how it is to be done. I will never believe," cried Madeline, with tears in her eyes, keeping back her lover with the pressure of her imperative hand, "that you are not our best and only friend. Tell us how to do it, and not merely that we are not to do it; any stranger could do that. But you are our best and only friend——"

This is not the usual kind of appeal to an obdurate father; but obdurate fathers are not consistent perhaps with daughters who have counted all the costs, and in

the last resort are aware that they themselves are free agents, not bound more than reason and affection dictate. Mr Thursley made still a faint attempt to brave it out, to adopt the tone of centuries past, to denounce the youth and threaten the girl; but it was only a faint attempt. The look which Madeline fixed upon him, regretful not for herself but for him, grieved by the violence which, her serious eyes said, diminished her respect for her father, without disturbing her resolution, was too much for Mr Thursley. And he knew very well, to begin with, that some mode of arranging matters must be found; that no violence on his part could induce his daughter to abandon her purpose, which takes the heart out of resistance. He came at last to the

terms, which he had vaguely settled in his own mind from the beginning, which were that Gervase should enter his own office, and work there, abandoning all his follies, and betaking himself to a business life. This was his ultimatum. "It is of no use telling me," he said, "that you have no turn for business, for nobody could have managed better with that West Indian affair; and let me tell you, my boy, there is no character in the world more honourable than that of an English merchant—whatever false ideas you may have got into your head."

"I think so too, Gervase," said Madeline in a whisper, with once more a pressure of his hand.

"I will make one concession," said the triumphant father, now feeling that the

positions were reversed, and that he had attained his fit supremacy. "If you should find yourself in a position to settle £10,000 on Madeline, I will withdraw my opposition; if not, the office and a wife, or your freedom without her. That's my last word—and I don't think one father in a hundred would say as much. It is to take or to leave."

Gervase went home to his empty echoing house with the subdued sensations of a struggle past. It was past, and his fate decided—a thing in which there is always a certain solace after a conflict. No need to enter into all the vicissitudes of argument again; no need for any more *pros* and *cons*. To take or to leave. To have Madeline with her father's consent, and without any painful breach of the enthral-

ling customs and traditions of life, or to drag her through all the harassing contradictions and trials of rebellion—to fret her mind with opposition to all the rules of established life. Gervase concluded with himself that it was now his certain duty to give up all those, perhaps fantastical, objections — that reluctance and rebellion which had already cost him so much. It was no longer even possible to fight. He had renounced that tenor of life which ought to have been second nature to a merchant's son—almost arrogantly, imperatively, hearing no reason when his father had suggested it; now he could not even struggle against a necessity which involved Madeline as well as himself. The house sounded very empty as he came into it. There was an echo through and through

it of the clanging of the door. He went into the library, in which he had held that last conference with his father, and sat down, sadly thinking of all that had come and gone. Had he yielded then, how different all might have been!—the house of Burton still intact; the old traditions unbroken; his father a man prosperous and respected; himself independent of all such remark as that which would now, he was painfully aware, be made everywhere. A man with nothing marrying a girl with a large fortune. When the wealth is on the other side there are no such remarks. But the moment that the woman has wealth, interest and not love is supposed to be the motive on the man's side. How unjust, how miserable, how horrible! But

however his heart might rebel against this cruel judgment, it would be made, he knew, and he would have to bear it.

If he had only done this thing which he must now do—from which there was no escape—a year ago!—if he had but consented, and pleased his father and satisfied those calls of nature and birth which, after all, it would appear no man could escape! His own father was more to him than Madeline's, though Madeline was more than all the world. Had he but insisted more strongly, been more urgent, commanded even! Gervase sat with his head in his hands, and thought. But he knew, at the same time, that however much his father had commanded, he would not have obeyed. He would have had no faith in

these paternal commands. He would have been sure, as Madeline had been, that in the end his own will would carry the day. As Madeline had been: yet Madeline had not stood out against this compromise; even her sympathy had deserted him at the last. It was by her ordinance, as well as her father's, that his will was to be subjugated—at the last.

Gervase had many renewed impulses of rebellion as he waked and watched during that long night. He was tempted to go away to the end of the world, to disappear into the darkness, and leave them—to repent, perhaps, of their attempted coercion. He had moments of resolution to withstand all compromise, to refuse the expedient held out to him, to maintain his own way—followed by sinkings of heart and courage,

by questionings with himself who was he that self-sacrifice should be demanded from every one but him? Self-sacrifice for Madeline—that was a very different thing, after all, from yielding up his own enlightened will to the obstinate insistence of his father—or of her father. A man may stand against every other claim upon him, but to prefer his own will to the woman he loves—to sacrifice *her* rather than do something he did not like—was very different. For her he had vowed to do everything that man could do—to die for her, to live for her, to think of nothing in comparison with her happiness. And this that was required of him was clearly for her happiness. If to release her from himself would make her happy, then it would be time for him to disappear, to go away, and leave no

trace, as his father had done; but that would make her miserable. It was Madeline that had to be considered, not himself or his pride, or his preference of one kind of work to another. The young man walked about the lonely library half the night fighting with himself. He had refused his father there — the father of whom he scarcely knew how to think, whether to pity or to blame, whether to approve or censure; but who had now passed away from his horizon, leaving nothing but Madeline,— no other influence, no other hope. Madeline was all he had in the world—no family, no sympathy, no home but her. What could the answer be when the question was to sacrifice her—or himself?

Next morning he saw her, very sweet

and anxious, wistfully interrogating his looks. "Nothing will make you like it, Gervase?" "No," he said, "nothing. It is hateful always. I cannot change in my conviction; but I will do it, and make the best of it—for you, Madeline." She asked him again before he left her, after they had talked and talked for hours. "Don't you think, as you get used to it, you will like it better, Gervase?" "I don't think I shall ever do anything but hate it; but never mind. I shall grumble at nothing when I have you." She looked after him with a curious light in her eyes as he went away. She was thinking very likely what she would do were she in his place. How little she would mind! how she would conquer any antipathy she had and put it under her feet, and scorn to confess it! Women

have such sentiments often, thinking how differently they would conduct themselves were they men. But then the things that are required of men are not often required of women. And Madeline reminded herself that she had no antipathy to overcome. She watched him, herself hidden among the curtains, as he went along the street, without any of the old spring and elasticity in his step. Poor Gervase! he had never known any trouble till now; but now it had come in a flood, and it was no wonder he was broken down. He was not perhaps the strongest of men by nature; but he was Gervase, which said all—and there was no other in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT day Gervaise received a communication from his bankers which filled him with the wildest amazement. This letter alarmed him when he saw it first. He thought that something had gone wrong—something new and unforeseen. When troubles come unexpectedly, overwhelming a man, his imagination gets demoralised, and expects nothing but further trouble — every footstep heard on the road seems to be that of a bearer of ill news. And when Gervase saw the well-known initials of this firm upon

the envelope, his heart failed him. There must be some new call, he thought—some unthought-of creditor must have turned up. Or he must have miscalculated his little balance. Something must be wrong. He opened the letter slowly, with fear and trembling. And the first reading of it conveyed no meaning to his confused mind. Ten thousand pounds! What was this about ten thousand pounds? A faint but incredible ray of light came into his mind at the second reading. He did not believe it. It was some trick of fancy, some delusion of his perturbed spirit, some practical joke at the best. Again: he rubbed his eyes, which smarted with want of sleep. Ten thousand pounds! It had got upon his brain, he thought; it was the scornful alternative Mr Thursley had flung at him,

the concession that was an impossibility. Ten thousand pounds to settle upon Madeline. Ten thousand—angels to deliver him from a life he hated. Was he going mad? Had it all at last been too much for his brain?

He took up Messrs Liphook, Liss, & Co.'s letter, and read it over aloud:—

"DEAR SIR,—We have the pleasure to inform you that a sum of ten thousand pounds has this day been paid into your account."

The words spoken audibly, though it was only by his own voice, aroused Gervase at last from his dazed and stupefied state. Was it true? It must be true! He rose up to his feet, to his full height, stretching

his throat, throwing back his head to get breath, stifled by the wonder, the almost terror, the shock of this new thing. The very sum that had been named—the money that was to deliver him, to give him the desire of his eyes, to free him, to be his salvation. He had been sitting in the library in the deserted house, very gloomy, looking about the bookcases, thinking of the advertisements that would describe this "library of a gentleman," about to be given to the auctioneer's hammer. Some of the books were dear to him; the whole place had upon him that strong hold of the familiar, the always known, which it is so difficult to divest of its power. There was not much to admire in the heavy bookcases, the solid furniture, nor even in the bulk of the somewhat commonplace collection of books

no gentleman's library could be without. But he had known it all his life; and the thought of the auctioneer, and all the vulgar tumult of the sale, was painful to him. He had been wondering if the money it would bring would be worth thinking of in the collapse of everything. But these thoughts all disappeared from his mind in a moment. For a little while after the extraordinary truth was fully apprehended he felt capable of thinking of nothing else. Ten thousand pounds! It is a sensation which comes to but few people in the world to receive such a sum unexpectedly, and at a moment when it is like life to the dead. Most people who get those windfalls have plenty of money already, and know all about them and are not excited. Ten thousand is not much when you have

hundreds of thousands, and are (naturally, having so much to begin with) in the way of legacies and happy accidents of all kinds. But when you have nothing, that which in other circumstances would be but a pleasing surprise is apt to shake you to the depths of your being, and feel like a visible interposition from above. Gervase was so stunned, so overwhelmed, so uplifted, that for a time the mere fact was as much as he could grasp. And he had seized his hat and rushed out to tell Madeline of his wonderful miraculous good fortune, before it occurred to him to ask himself from whom could this windfall come?

The thought came upon him when he was half-way down the street on his way to his love. Who in all the world could have sent him ten thousand pounds? Few

people are able to bestow such a present, still fewer have the least inclination to do so. The wonder in Gervase's mind was but momentary. It was answered as by a flash of lightning, by an instinctive unquestioning certainty of reply. And suddenly, instead of walking on as he had been doing, his rapid steps grew slow, his countenance flushed with sudden enlightenment, and then grew pale. "My father!"—he almost stopped short altogether, almost turned back. Who but his father could send him such a present? Who but he had interest enough in Gervase to come to his aid anonymously, silently? "My father:" he repeated it to himself. The first time it had been the cry of a sudden discovery, full of pleasure, an impulse too quick for thought. But the second had a tone in it

of despair. A discovery of another kind came with the second thought. Nothing kept back! that had been his father's glory and distinction. Was it thus for ever proved to be untrue?

He went into Madeline's presence with almost reluctant steps, his joy over. He did not perceive what eyes less preoccupied must have done, that she was full of expectation, waiting for him with a visible anxiety and suspense, eager to hear something. He never even remarked this curious expectation in her, he was altogether absorbed in his own sensations. "What is it, Gervase?" she said, her breath coming quick, two spots of red upon her cheeks; but why she should show any excitement he did not even ask himself. "The most extraordinary thing has happened," he said.

"What has happened? I saw at once in your face there was something. What is it? your father——"

"I suppose it must be my father," he said, with a heavy long breath. "Madeline, ten thousand pounds—the very sum your father said—has been paid into the bank for me. I was wild with delight for a moment."

"Ten thousand pounds, Gervase! Then you are freed!—it is not a question any longer between me and the life you hate. Thank heaven, you are free!"

"Yes," he said, "I am free. I am no longer called upon to make any sacrifice—if I can make up my mind to accept."

"To accept—Gervase!"

"Madeline," said the young man, "nothing is so simple as it appears. There's

complications in everything. At first, I confess, I was overjoyed. It is miserable of me to grudge any sacrifice for you. You are worth far more than the giving up of my wretched instincts. Still, dear, I was glad, I must say. But then comes the thought—So far as I can see, this could come only from my father."

"Well, Gervase?"

"And my father was honoured and praised for keeping back nothing. They gave him his house—the house my only property—to show their sense of the fact that he had kept back nothing. Don't you see the irony of it? He must have kept back—who can tell what?—when he has enough to send me this. Oh, Madeline, it makes my heart sick!"

Madeline's countenance was a wonderful

sight, had he had eyes to see it. She grew very red, her eyes filled: an air of impatient vexation, almost beyond her control, came into her face. But Gervase noted nothing, being fully occupied with his own thoughts.

"I ask myself, can I use this money which has been subtracted from cooked accounts—which has been withdrawn from its first honest purpose of paying his creditors—which is false money, dishonest money? Good heavens! Madeline, my darling, have pity on me—don't think me a fool. My father, whom I always trusted—whom I thought an honourable man——"

"You have no right," said Madeline, in a voice which was low and trembling, "to say that he is not an honourable man."

"If he has sent me this—and who else

could have sent it?—how can I ever believe in him more? He paid his creditors only 15s. in the pound, and got credit for having kept back nothing—while all the while—— How," cried Gervase, walking about the room with hasty steps, "how can I use money—that has been so procured?"

Two hasty tears fell from Madeline's eyes. "Oh, this is too much," she said to herself quickly—but Gervase was too much taken up with his own emotions to observe hers, and she dried the tears with a hurried hand.

"Gervase," she said, in a tone which was not without slight traces of exasperation, "you have at least paid all your father's debts—in full."

"Thank heaven!" he said.

"Well, how do you know he has not

heard of that, and — and pays you back like this? Much more likely than that he knew you had special occasion for the money. How should he know? But he would hear you had paid his debts, and he gives it you back."

Gervase shook his head. "I would give it all," he cried, "ten times told, to make sure that he did not wilfully, consciously, to the detriment of his creditors, keep this back."

"At the worst," she said, evidently compelling herself to patience, "they are all paid; there is nobody to whom it is due."

"No one that I know of; but, Madeline——"

"Oh," she cried, almost wildly, "don't bring up any more objections, Gervase! If it is your father's, it is only right that

he should provide for you. You have paid everything for him. You have no right to refuse him, or to make a fuss about the money. Don't say any more! or it is I who will go out of my senses," she cried, suddenly bursting into an almost hysterical flood of tears, which she had no power to restrain.

This brought Gervase to his senses. He was—oh, so tender of her weakness, of the excited nerves of which she had lost control, and the evident long tension of her feelings, which had broken at last. He took her into his arms and soothed her, calling her by every tender name he could think of. "What a brute I am—to torment you with all my whims and scruples! All you say is like gospel, Madeline. I know, I know it is all true. I don't know

what I deserve for troubling you with these idiotic fancies of mine. I know I ought to be too thankful that everything is thus made possible for us. And so I shall be when I have time to think. It is only the first shock, the conviction that my father——"

"Gervase," she said, "don't let any one but me hear you speak of him as you have done. He is your father. And how can you tell whether he is to blame? By you at least he should never be made to appear so. I feel sure—that he is not to blame."

"If you think so, I will think so too," he cried fervently. And he did his best to keep his word. He kept it at least in her presence, while her faith influenced him. If his heart sank when he was alone, nobody was the wiser. And, in-

deed, from this moment the pace of events was so much accelerated that Gervase had much less time to think. Mr Thursley received the news of his sudden accession of wealth with a long whistle, in which was surprise, yet something else besides surprise. "I thought as much," he said, nodding his head; but what he thought he did not explain. He went chuckling about the house for the remainder of the day, uttering now and then a broken exclamation in which there was something about an old fox. Gervase was wise enough to ask no explanations. He felt in his heart that Mr Thursley thought as he did, but was not wounded as he was by the thought: and the young man breathed a sigh of relief, and thanked heaven that he was freed for ever from

those methods and tenets, which made it not entirely blamable in a man to hold back something that was not his, and make meet provision for his own necessities, while preserving the semblance of perfect honour to others. He himself had to keep silence, or to consent to be considered ultra-fantastical even by the woman he loved. He yielded to fate, not willingly, with a sense of repugnance, and resistance which would have seemed extraordinary, unjustifiable almost to all reasonable people. Perhaps it was no great shadow among all the brightness that now surrounded him, but still he felt it to the bottom of his heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE marriage followed with little delay, and Mr Thursley's settlements on his daughter were not illiberal. Gervase paid but little attention to these business preliminaries, except to settle the ten thousand pounds so opportunely but so unsatisfactorily bestowed upon him, upon Madeline; it seemed to him that he had nothing to do with the matter. The house sold well, and brought him enough for his merely personal needs, and it was a kind of relief to his mind that

the equivocal ten thousand did not, so to speak, soil his own fingers at all, but went at once to Madeline—which was a fantastical consolation, since, of course, their produce formed a large part of the income upon which the young pair had to live. They set themselves up in a pretty old-fashioned house, happily discovered in a ramble, and bearing a dilapidated aspect which delighted both. They made of it a paradise, according to their enlightened notions, too enlightened to be altogether in bondage to Liberty and Burnet, yet using these pioneers of art judiciously, and finding a great deal of entertainment in the old furniture shops through which they made many raids, scorning the recognised artists in that particular, the Gillows,

and the Jacksons and Grahams, as is the manner of their kind. Even Gervase, it must be allowed, got a great deal of entertainment out of the furnishing, notwithstanding the various cares which lay upon his heart.

He had made all possible inquiries, it need scarcely be said, at once at the bank to endeavour to trace the money—but in vain; and he had set on foot all the researches that were practicable to find some trace of his father. But it would seem, though it is a theory rather against modern notions, that it is more easy for a man to disappear than for the most experienced pursuers to find him. He was asked for over half America, which is a big word; he was sought in Australia; the foreign baths and water-

ing-places, where it was so very unlikely such a man should go, were ransacked for him: but no trace, not so much as a footprint, anywhere could be found. He had disappeared as criminals often do, and innocent people sometimes, and after a long period of ineffectual exertions, the pursuit was given up. Whether Gilbert, the man left in charge of the house, knew anything, Gervase never could find out; but if he did, he was proof against all inducements to speak, and never betrayed his old master.

And the young people settled down, far from the excitements and cares of that business life which Gervase had evaded so successfully, in what is perhaps the most enjoyable of all the ordinary paths of modern existence. All paths of existence

are tolerable when people are young and happy and not badly off, though it is not always that these favourites of fortune recognise the fact. Gervase had been one of the most obstinate in his struggle against it, and the most determined to have his own way. Perhaps he considered now that his happiness was owing to the persistence with which he had struggled for his own way. At all events, he had the grace to be very happy, and grumbled no more. He was not indeed a person of literary genius, but he was a man with a subject, which in many cases answers better, as a means of acquiring reputation at least. He had studied very closely, during his forced residence there, the conditions of the West Indian islands. It is a subject of which there are but

few qualified exponents. He had seen a great deal of all classes, from the impracticable negro to the demoralised Englishman. Agents, lawyers, all the curious insular community had revealed themselves to him. His experience and his observations were both to be respected, and gave him authority. And he thus acquired rapidly — much more rapidly than had he been a man of genius — a certain recognised position and reputation. He had his subject, in which he was competent to criticise the very first of fine writers, and even with the aid of facts to put him down.

It was some years after these events, and when the young pair had already provided themselves with a sort of a curb upon their wanderings in the shape

of a nursery, that they made an expedition in the summer to the Lake country. It was comparatively early in the year, before the time of the tourists had begun, and they had the lakes and dales comparatively to themselves. They were wandering along the side of one of the lesser lakes one evening, when it lay in the ecstasy of sunset and silence, commemorated by the poet of those northern wilds. "Silent as a nun, breathless with adoration." The hills that clustered round in every imaginable peak and slope, like a hundred fantastic yet sympathetic spectators, were appearing over each other's shoulders, each in its turn catching the last gleam of the light. Our travellers had been wandering along, lingering over every new combination, pointing out to

each other new wonders, over and over again repeated. Finally, as the light began to forsake them, Madeline had gone on a little in advance, while Gervase paused to gather, in a marshy corner close to the lake, a flower which was characteristic of that country and rare in other places. He followed her in about ten minutes, with wet feet, but carrying his flower in triumph. They had passed in the morning a pretty house, half cottage, half villa, near the water, and had remarked its cheerful little lawn, the small protecting shrubbery round, its sheltered position under the lea of a great cliff which protected it from the east and north, and the abundance of flowers everywhere. As Gervase came along the road now, hurrying to overtake Madeline, he saw a

burly figure approaching the gate. There was too little light to make the features distinguishable at such a distance, but something in the man's walk and the outline of his figure made the young man's heart stop beating. What a strange familiar aspect the passing figure bore! the shape and outline, the way in which he planted his feet, the measure of his step, the coat thrown back a little from his chest. Gervase stood still, and his breath came quick. The man at whom he was gazing ascended soberly to the sloping path round the lawn. The door opened, and two or three children burst out, receiving him with cries of welcome. He took up one, an infant, in his arms, and disappeared within the door.

Gervase had dropped his flower in the shock of this apparition. He found himself standing breathless in the middle of the road, staring blankly at the house within which this stranger had disappeared. He was bewildered, stupefied, and yet excited, he could scarcely tell how. By what? —by nothing that he could put into words: by an impression of something well known, familiar as his own voice, and yet so strange, unexpected, impossible. While he stood thus astonished, undecided, not knowing what to think, the sound of hurrying footsteps filled the silence, and Madeline suddenly appeared running towards him. She put out her hands and grasped his arm. "Gervase, Gervase! did you see him?" she cried.

"Whom? I saw—a man going up to that house."

"A man! Then you did not see—you did not recognise——" She leant against him, out of breath with haste and agitation.

"Madeline, you don't think——? There was something in his walk—and his figure."

"I think nothing—I saw him—he passed me quite close. I saw him as plainly as I see you."

"Could it be—a mere chance resemblance? Such things are."

"No—I could not be mistaken. It was your father. I don't think he noticed me at all. He was looking at the house with the air of a man going home."

"There were children," said Gervase.

"He can only be—a visitor."

At that moment some one above them among the shrubberies came out, and calling apparently from the back of the house towards the stables, bade some one else come in—come in directly; for the master had just come home.

The two on the road looked at each other with wondering eyes. They were both very much excited—a discovery so strange, so unlikely and unlooked for, and surrounded with circumstances so bewildering, confused every sense. They stood for some minutes consulting what they should do. Gervase was so much astounded, so taken aback by what he had seen, that he inclined to the supposition of a resemblance. "There were children," he repeated, blankly. But Madeline had no sort of doubt.

After a while they went back to their inn, which was a small and homely one in the bosom of a valley, little frequented by visitors, where the landlady herself cooked their dinners, and came and looked on, kindly urging them to eat, while they consumed it. They asked her who lived in the house close by, and received at once the fullest explanations. "Very quiet folks, but most respectable—the gentleman a deal older than his good lady. No, they've not been very long here — four or five years, not more. Very particular about their newspapers and things coming; but just very quiet folks, staying in their own house summer and winter, and seeing no company. She's just an uncommon nice lady, and very friendly—and will stop for a chat without a bit of pride; but he keeps

himself to himself, being a kind of an elderly gentleman."

"Do you know his name?" Madeline asked; for Gervase in his bewilderment was scarcely capable of speech.

"Do I know his name?—bless me! you must think us queer folks—as well as I know my own. He's Mr Burton, and the house is Hillhead. You'll maybe know the gentleman?"

"I think—my husband knows him," Madeline said.

To find that there was no concealment, —that the man who had disappeared so strangely was living here in perfect unblemished respectability and security, with no mystery about him, increased in the most curious way the excitement of the discovery. But there arose, at this point,

a remarkable difference between the young pair. For Madeline, bewildered by the thought of the unsuspected domestic establishment, did all she could to convince her husband that to go away and take no notice was the kindest and best thing to do. "You can write," she said. "It would embarrass him to see you. He would have to explain. Gervase, don't disturb the seclusion he has chosen." She grew quite warm upon this subject, with an uneasy look in her eyes.

"There is no reason why he should be embarrassed. I am not his judge. But I must see him," Gervase said. They spent a disturbed and anxious night, so disturbed by the strange discovery, so startled by the circumstances, that neither slept much. And in the morning, notwithstanding

Madeline's opposition, Gervase set out to see the lost father, who had thus reversed all natural circumstances. Hillhead looked brighter than ever in the morning sunshine. The lake lay at the foot of the knoll, like a sheet of silver. Two or three tiny children were playing upon the lawn. As Gervase approached the door, the master of the house came out with a newspaper in his hand and a cigar. He sat down in a wicker chair upon the lawn. He cast a glance upon the lovely landscape and the playing children. The air of a man entirely at his ease, under his own vine and his own fig-tree, was in every movement. Gervase's step, in his agitation, was very quick and light. Apparently it was not till he was quite near that it was heard by the comfortable paterfamilias with his newspaper.

Then one of the children, a little girl of four or five, startled by the sight of the stranger, ran and stood by her father's knee. "What is it?" Gervase heard him say. And then he looked up from behind the newspaper, and the father and son met. Mr Burton was evidently much startled. He rose hastily from his chair, dropping his paper. A curious tremor seemed to come over his solid well-set-up figure, that of a vigorous man of sixty or so. Men do not blush easily at that age; but there came a wave of hot colour over his face. He seemed to hesitate a moment, then—"Why, Gervase, how have you managed to find me out at the end of the world?" he said, with a nervous attempt at a laugh. Gervase saw, agitated as he himself was, the hurried glance at the children, which

made his father look like a prodigal discovered.

He explained hurriedly that it was mere chance which had brought him here, and with great embarrassment, that he had tried every means of discovering his father's whereabouts for years, but in vain.

"That is strange," Mr Burton said. He had, in the meantime, reassured himself by seeing that the embarrassment was fully more great on the part of Gervase than on his own. "That is strange: for I have attempted no concealment. I have been living here, as you may have discovered, ever since I—left London."

"Yes," said Gervase, "we have heard. I saw you last night, sir, coming home—though too far off to be more than startled by your walk and figure, which I felt I

recognised—but Madeline met you in the road."

"Madeline! To be sure, you are married! I have to congratulate you, Gervase."

"And I," said the young man, "have to thank you, father. But for the money you sent me so generously — so opportunely——"

"The money I sent you!"

"That ten thousand pounds——"

"Ten thousand pounds! You must be dreaming. I have not ten thousand pence —more than I require for myself."

"Then it was not from you?"

"Certainly it was not from me. I thought you provided for with the money you brought from the West Indies—which, as I saw by the papers, you threw away.

Certainly after that exploit, if I had been able to spare ten thousand pounds, I should not have sent it to you to make ducks and drakes of." Mr Burton was too glad of the opportunity to regain a position more befitting their relationship, and Gervase was too much lost in the confusion of his thoughts to say a word; but the prodigal father was suddenly brought down from this brief superiority by the sudden appearance at the door of a pretty young woman, half lady, half housekeeper, who, calling to him as Mr Burton, begged to know whether the meat was coming by the coach, or if the butcher——. She paused when she saw the stranger, and said, "Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't see as any one was with you,"—retreating again, though not without a lingering look

of curiosity. Again the flush of an unbecoming embarrassment passed over Mr Burton's face.

"Come here, Mary," he said. "Gervase, this is my wife. We—we—were married some years before I—left."

She rubbed her hand surreptitiously with her apron before she held it out. "Will —the gentleman stay to dinner, Mr Burton?" she said.

The eyes of the father and son met. In the one there was an appeal for forbearance, an apology, an entreaty. Do not disturb my peace, they seemed to say. In the other nothing but confusion and bewilderment. Gervase said hastily, "We are going away this morning." He saw the look of relief in Mr Burton's eyes with a sympathetic sensation. He, him-

self, wanted nothing so much as to get away.

Young Mrs Burton lingered a little. She called her children about her—a pretty group — evidently with the intention of showing her husband's friend, with natural pride, what there was to be said on her side. Mr Burton looked at them with a less justifiable but not less natural pride, not untouched with shame, in his elderly eyes. "That will do, that will do, Mary; take them away," he cried. Then he said, turning to his son, "I see you agree with me, Gervase, that it's better not to disturb her mind. She's a very good wife to me, and takes great care of me—and the children."

"They are beautiful children," said Gervase.

"Are they not?" cried the old gentleman, exultant. But he checked himself, and put a few formal questions about his son's affairs, walking with him towards the gate. "I am very glad to have seen you," he said—"sincerely glad. You can let me know when anything particular happens. Otherwise don't trouble about correspondence. And I need not ask you to say nothing about your discovery, nor my present address, nor——"

"You may rely upon me, father."

"That's quite enough — that's quite enough. God bless you, my boy! I am sincerely glad to have seen you—good-bye, good-bye!" Mr Burton said.

Gervase walked back along the lake-side, with a clouded brow and a bewildered mind. He could not think of his father's strange

new position, for thinking of the mystery rediscovered in his own life. If it did not come from Mr Burton, from whom did it come, that ten thousand pounds? He met Madeline about half-way to the inn. She told him she had been too much excited to rest; that she had come to meet him out of pure nervousness. "Tell me all about it," she said, looking in his face with very bright, feverish, uneasy eyes.

"Madeline," he said, "my father did not send me that ten thousand pounds."

"Dear Gervase, is that all you have to tell me? Tell me about him, about *her*, about those children."

"If my father did not send it, who did? There is no other question in the world for me till I know this. I must find out. I am going home at once."

"Let us go by all means; but that is an old affair. Surely now you may let it rest."

He put his hands upon her shoulders and looked into her face. "You would not answer so lightly if it were as much a mystery to you as to me. Madeline, at least tell me the truth."

She freed herself from his hold and from his gaze, with a burst of nervous laughter; then clinging to his arm, and pressing her head against his shoulder, made her confession. "It was the ten thousand pounds my old aunt left me to be at my own disposal—nobody knew but old Mr Mentore, who did not disapprove. You wanted it only to settle it upon me. Gervase, what was the harm?"

"Only that you played a trick upon

me, Madeline, when I trusted you so entirely — only that you have deceived me into owing you everything, when I thought——"

"And are you so ungenerous," she cried, "so formal, so conventional, Gervase—oh, forgive me for saying it — as to mind? Would you rather we had not married, had not loved perhaps, had not been happy— to save your pride?"

It is a fine thing to assume indignation and a high superiority to sublunary motives. Gervase was beaten down by this appeal and reproach. He was in fact a very happy man; and he knew, which was a great solace to that pride which he could not have met otherwise, that he was a very creditable husband. And it was indeed all past, and could not be changed. He did

not maintain a grudge for such a cause against his wife.

But it cannot be denied that it gave him many thoughts. This anxious mysterious world in which even the nearest and dearest can thus deceive each other; where thoughts unknown to us go on within the heads that share our very pillow, and secret stories exist in the soberest and most well regulated of lives. What a strange world it is! and how little we know!

THE END.

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